ARCHITECTURE AND THE RECORD:
NEGOTIATING FEMINISM IN THE JEZEBEL COMMENTS

BY

MELISSA K. FORBES

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2019

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Peter Mortensen, Chair
Professor Emerita Gail Hawisher
Associate Professor Lindsay Rose Russell
Professor Dànielle Nicole DeVoss, Michigan State University

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores contemporary feminist discourse as it unfolds in relation to the website Jezebel, giving particular attention to the rising conflict between editorial content, reader commentary, and the affordances of website architecture. Regularly described as feminist in everything from the *New York Times* to HBO's *Girls*, prominent women's website Jezebel covers many topics and arguments popularly considered to be feminist concerns. Nevertheless, the site has never actually claimed the label. Drawing on article content, comment threads, forum posts, and commenting guidelines from Jezebel's founding in 2007 until the adoption of its current commenting system in 2014, I show how readers leverage Jezebel's comment section to intervene in what they deem to be problematic feminism in the main site content. Jezebel's indeterminate feminism allows the site to profit from baiting its feminist readership while avoiding accountability to feminist principles; the commenters respond by appropriating the comment section to strengthen Jezebel's feminist subjectivity. The role constructed for commenters by the architecture of the commenting system undermines the role editors attempt to legislate for them through increasingly detailed guidelines, leading to philosophical conflicts over site ownership. When changes in the commenting system led to an influx in disruptive trolling behaviors, commenters were forced to collectively negotiate the aims of the comment section as they sought to determine the limits of acceptable dissent in the commenting space. Crucially, the commenting architecture shapes discursive possibilities in ways that are sometimes at odds with feminist values; I conclude by attending to the ways community members resist those seemingly deterministic structures. This work contributes to rhetoric and composition's decades-long conversation about feminism and women's spaces online and extends the parameters of an emerging conversation about the rhetorical function of comment sections.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Kevin, thank you for your steadiness as I wobbled my way through this. Thank you for all those times you drove out and picked up Taco Bell when you wanted something else. Thank you for letting me talk at you for an hour during your lunch breaks when all you wanted was to make a sandwich and relax. Thank you for showing me all the better ways to organize my research and only very gently making fun of my proprietary "system." What do people do who aren't married to librarians? May I never have to know.

To Alexandra Cavallaro, collaborator and friend, thank you for your unyielding support and ever-present cheerleading. Thank you for being confident in my ideas when I was not.

To Carrie Dickison, thank you for over two decades of afternoons at libraries and coffee shops, and for pointing me toward writing studies in the first place. Thank you for always having the answers to logistical questions and for being a keen and tactful reader.

To Kate Wellington, thank you for your eternal optimism, your project management skills, and your blatant bribery. I don't know how many people receive quirky gifts for making their writing goals, but I'm delighted to be one of them.

To Victoria Reuter, thank you for all your hand-holding and back-patting through the final bloody stages. Your support has been a bridge over some very deep places.

To my parents, thank you for loving learning and for raising me to do the same.

To all those friends on social media who posted publicly about their own writing anxieties and helped me feel less alone, thank you, thank you, thank you.

And finally, thank you to the members of my committee, past and present.

To Spencer Schaffner, for his insightful questions and his patience.

To Gail Hawisher, whose warm encouragement shaped this as my dissertation path and for whose continued commitment to this project I am deeply grateful.

To Lindsay Rose Russell, who kindly and calmly stepped up in my moment of need.

To Danielle Nicole DeVoss, whose energy and encouragement have helped keep this project alive.

And to Peter Mortensen, who turned what could have been a freefall into a successful landing. Your kind and steady feedback pulled this project across the finish line, and I am endlessly appreciative.

For me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, I was still a baby feminist—not quite comfortable with the label, still shaking off a small town that preferred the term "feminazi." When I came across Jezebel, it blew my mind. Here was a women's website where an impassioned discussion of maternal mortality rates rubbed elbows with a reimagining of an upscale women's clothing catalogue as illustrations for a Southern Gothic novel. The writing was smart, funny, snarky, and in direct contradiction with the image of the "humorless feminist" I'd gleaned from my schoolmates, and the idea that it was acceptable to care both about misogyny and about reality television was a revelation. But wait, there was more: at the end of each article were dozens, sometimes hundreds of comments that were, astonishingly, as good as or better than the articles themselves. Soon I was all but skimming the articles themselves, rushing to get to the vibrant, prolific discussions chugging along at the bottom of the page.

I'd never seen anything like this comment section. Unlike on most sites, you actually had to audition to be a commenter—if your *mot* wasn't *bon* enough, it would just never show up on the page. If it was, you were in—but only to the bottom tier. If you wanted your comment to show up in black instead of gray, you had to demonstrate real value to the community: if you were funny enough, or smart enough, or insightful enough, a writer or moderator might "star" you, promoting you to the top tier; then, you had truly arrived. Eventually, I would come to understand that Jezebel and its comment section exist at the center of concerns about the commodification and exploitation of feminism. At the time, I just thought it was awesome.

The more I paid attention to the conversations in the comments the more I was able to learn about what feminism *was*, what it *wasn't*, and what was still up for collective negotiation.

The commenters often disagreed with the editors[1] and with each other, but for the most part there was a spirit of good-faith debate that I enjoyed. Then, in the summer of 2010, things took a turn. With my spouse doing fieldwork across the country, for eight weeks it was just me, my cats, and Jezebel. Previously mostly an avid lurker, I ramped up my participation, commenting multiple times a day, engaging in long, ongoing threads, and eventually even earning my star. But just as I was diving in, the waters turned choppy. I watched in dismay as conflicts between writers and commenters became more frequent and more intense, well-liked and respected commenters getting banned or demoted for infractions that seemed small or, many argued, were not actually infractions at all. People were leaving, one group even founding their own competing publication that still, as of 2019, continues to occasionally publish posts.[2]

As someone spending more time with the writers and commenters of Jezebel than with literally any human being, I worried Jezebel like a rope. Why did the editors seem so dismissive of the commenters' concerns? Why were the commenters so vehement in their critiques? How was it that while every other site in the Gawker Media family had just one set of commenting guidelines, Jezebel had a dozen? Overinvested and increasingly distressed by what I saw, I did what any reasonable person would do: I wrote a 1,000-word email to the editor-in-chief. "Dear Jessica," I began. "I know you are very busy, but I was wondering if you, as editor-in-chief, would be willing to discuss with me the following questions: What is the purpose of Jezebel, and what is the purpose of having the commenters?"

From there, I laid out my hypothesis: that the true origin of all the conflicts were conflicting answers to these questions—the commenters were operating under one framework while the editors enforced another. Although I was sure everyone agreed that Jezebel was there

[1] All staff writers at Jezebel are referred to as editors.
[2] Persephone Magazine, at persephonemagazine.com.

to provide entertainment, community, and critique and discussion of women's issues, I wrote, "is it being provided for the sake of the editors (to express their thoughts), the sake of the commenters (to spark discussion), or the sake of posterity (to make necessary points)?" If the commenters interpreted Jezebel's aim as public feminist commentary, I reasoned, it made sense that they would feel obligated to intervene in how feminism was being portrayed and shocked and resentful at being told their opinions were not welcome. If the editors approached the site as a sort of joint LiveJournal for their individual opinions, it made sense that they would bristle at being told that they were "doing it wrong." The ambiguity, I argued, was the problem. After laying out several specific areas of concern and suggesting some ways to mitigate them, I concluded by reiterating my desire for role clarification: "Are we all a community together, are you the facilitators of our community, or are we here to be your community of fans?"

Despite the presence of both bullet points and subheads, my detailed theories about what was going wrong did not solve the problems at Jezebel.[3] They did, however, form the first kernel of the text you now see before you.

I start with this story for several reasons.

1. The heated, recurring conflicts between editors and commenters point toward fundamental disagreement about what might seem a superficial question: what are comment sections *for*? And specifically, what is the role of the comment section of a feminist publication?
2. My overinvestment in the space was not an accident. The comment sections of the Gawker Media sites were designed to maximize what Barbara Ley calls the "architecture of commitment" and keep people coming back to the site. This is just one way that the

[3] For an account of Coen's response, see the beginning of the conclusion.

commenting architecture shapes discursive possibilities in particular directions.

3. Both my own experience and the experiences discussed by other commenters attest to the role of the Jezebel comment section as a sort of lyceum or rhetorical school for budding feminists, and it is important to understand how these lessons are shaped by the commenting architecture.

This dissertation centers on the relationship between contemporary feminist discourse and the online comment section as a discursive space. Specifically, I approach Jezebel as the center of a network of competing concerns about the exploitation of feminism and show how the commenting community defines itself both within and against that web. Ultimately, I show that the existing commenting structure serves patriarchal and capitalistic ends, but that feminist community members resist its limitations and consciously read and write against that institutional framing.

This dissertation is about comment sections, but in being about comment sections it is also about gender, toxic masculinity, online communities, public rhetorics, platform studies, and feminist design. To me, this is the draw of comment sections in the first place; they're hotbeds of complex activities that intersect with each other in unexpected ways. My approach, then, constellates scholarship from multiple disciplines: writing studies, new media studies, platform studies, and feminist design theory, among others. Although scholarship on comment sections has been steadily growing, much of this work approaches comments as a means of better understanding discourse on the primary site. My work, on the other hand, begins by conceiving of the comment section as a discursive space, and then asks what happens in it.

Like Adrienne Massanari's book on the culture of Reddit, this dissertation is a study of a particular website (Jezebel) at a particular time (2007 to 2014). As will be discussed in detail in

Chapter 1, Jezebel was founded in 2007 to help Gawker Media Group's[4] menu of blogs appeal to the female demographic. In 2010, founding editor Anna Holmes stepped down and was replaced by Jessica Coen, whose "more commercial sensibility" (Doll, 2013) would reshape the site in sometimes controversial ways. During Coen's four years as editor-in-chief, Jezebel weathered some of its most stormy commenter-editor relations as tensions between profitability and ideological purity came to a head. Further complicating matters, in 2012 and 2013 Jezebel joined the rest of Gawker Media's sites in transitioning to a new proprietary commenting architecture called Kinja, which radically shifted the dynamics of the comment section and allowed an influx of trolling and harassment. While prior to the change most major conflicts on the site had occurred vertically between the commenter and the editors, after the implementation of Kinja, conflict was realigned along horizontal lines, among commenters themselves. With the comments suddenly open to aggressive, disruptive, and offensive content, the core question of my email re-emerged, recontextualized: what and who is a feminist comment section for?

In *Computers and Composition*'s 2019 special issue on technofeminisms, guest editors Dànielle Nicole DeVoss, Angela Haas, and Jacqueline Rhodes conducted an online roundtable discussion with prominent scholars in the field (DeVoss, 2019). In their discussion of "the past, present, and future of technofeminism," there emerged a consensus that feminism is now taken less seriously in the academy than it has been in the past. "It seems that feminism is a much more dirty word now than it used to be 20 or 30 years ago," says Jacqueline Rhodes. "I've found that it's much easier for me to get legitimacy in the academy by talking about technology, and only secondarily as a feminist" (DeVoss, 2019). Other participants agree, saying that rather than a

[4] In 2016, in the wake of a lawsuit over a sex tape that was released without its star's consent, Gawker Media Group was sold to Univision and began to operate as Gizmodo Media Group. Nevertheless, to maintain continuity with the meta-discourse of the period under study, I will use "Gawker Media" or "Gawker Media Group" throughout this dissertation.

rigorous method, feminism is now perceived as "an ideology or personal opinion" both by scholars and by students (Lisa Nakamura), and that students have "a narrow understanding" of "the co-opted version of feminism" that is not grounded in the queer, indigenous, and black texts that many consider to be the foundation of feminist theory, e.g. Audre Lorde, Judith Butler, and bell hooks (Angela Haas). And yet, Radhika Gajjala says, the watered-down version of feminism that tends to spread online has brought many graduate students to her program specifically to study digital cultures and activism from a feminist perspective.

While feminism as a theoretical approach may be taking some hits in the academy, then, vernacular feminism is thriving. A 2016 study by the Washington Post and the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 60 percent of women identify as feminists or strong feminists, with only 2 percent considering themselves anti-feminist; for men, the numbers are 33 and 5 percent, respectively (Cai & Clement, 2016). Celebrities as anodyne as Taylor Swift (Hoby, 2014) and Kim Kardashian (Ivie, 2017) have publicly claimed the label, as well as (improbably) multiple contestants on harem-style dating show *The Bachelor* (e.g., Joynt, 2017; Weiss, 2016). A 2018 tweet from UN Women ("the [United Nations] entity for #genderequality and empowerment for women") asks, "Do you believe that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities? Congratulations," it goes on. "You're a feminist!" (UN_Women). Feminism—a version of it, anyway—has entered the mainstream.

Understanding feminism

"Feminism" contains multitudes. Even just within rhetoric and composition itself, Jennifer Sano-Franchini, Donnie Sackey, and Stacey Pigg point out, feminism is "simultaneously an analytical tool, social/bodily identity, and disciplinary identity" (p. 4), not to speak of the

multiple roles it play outside the scholarly world. Depending on who is practicing it, feminism might involve pushing back against the normalization of sexual assault as in Tarana Burke's #MeToo movement or pushing back against gender and even humanity as categories as in Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985). It might be concerned with gender inequality in the workplace (Sandberg, 2015), or it might call such concerns symptomatic of destructive neoliberalism (Rottenberg, 2018). There is not even consensus on whether feminism "ought" to focus on the concerns of women or simply include gender as one dimension of larger concerns with oppression and marginalization. Indeed, so many formulations of feminism are in operation at any given moment that approaching feminism as a unified concept is "just not fruitful" (Kirsch and Royster, 2010, p. 643).

For Kirsch and Royster, this unstable core is an important part of feminism's nature. Defining feminism as "a variously articulated commitment to justice, equality, empowerment, and peace," they emphasize the need for "keeping the contours of this notion dynamic and open" (p. 644) and ensuring that its discourses are "interrogated actively, critiqued vigorously, and negotiated carefully and caringly in sense-making and knowledge making processes" (p. 643). Sano-Franchini, Sackey, and Pigg found that while the writing studies scholars they interviewed associate feminism broadly with "decentralization, inclusivity, and valuing individual perspectives and voices" (p. 1), feminism both in its "everyday use" and in its scholarly development has been troubled by questions of who is included and whose voices are valued. For decades, feminists of color such as Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, and Maivân Clech Lâm have "addressed the limitations of a feminism that includes only its own interests and experiences" (Sano-Franchini et al., 2011, p. 2). And while a focus on women is inherent in the name "feminist," feminist disabilities scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2005) articulates how

destabilizations of gender as a category have called attention to the inescapable influence of other bodily identities:

> Feminism questioned the coherence, boundaries, and exclusions of the term *woman*—the very category on which it seemed to depend. Consequently, it expanded its lexicon beyond gender differences to include the many inflections of identity that produce multiple subjectivities and subject positions. Our most sophisticated feminist analyses illuminate how gender interlocks with race, ethnicity, sexuality and class systems. This focus on how identity operates prompted an interest in the relation between bodies and identity. (p. 1559)

While sex and gender have been the organizing principle of the feminist movement, these markers exist at the intersection of other marked and unmarked identities that inflect and at times supersede their role. I thus consider intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990) to be part of feminism's mandate.

Throughout the dissertation, when I refer to "feminists" or "feminist websites," I refer specifically to people or sites that have claimed that label for themselves—not because I believe than anyone who identifies as a feminist automatically "counts" as a feminist but rather because anyone who identifies as a feminist automatically becomes part of negotiations of what exactly the label means. In discussion of writing and rhetorics, however, I use "feminist" not just for "any written or spoken act about feminisms within the context of feminist interventions online" (Lane, 2015) but also for activities that embody feminist principles such as multivocality, disruption, and collaboration in digital rhetorics (LeCourt and Barnes, 1999; Lane, 2015; Davis, 2019).

With the popular unmooring from feminist texts mourned by Haas above, what constitutes feminism is up for grabs. And yet feminist political science scholar Linda Zerilli (2005) contends that robust non-expert discourse is a "world-building" practice that is vital both to feminism and to democracy. Conversations about, negotiations of, and boundary work in feminist identity are a vital part of contemporary feminism's work both inside and outside the academy. In her study of hashtag feminism, Liz Lane (2015) focuses on rhetors and rhetorics that engage directly in shaping and negotiating representations of feminism, a "fourth wave" of feminist activity that she describes as "feminist consciousness-raising work" in a skeptical world. "To build feminist dwellings," Sara Ahmed writes in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), "we need to dismantle what has already been assembled; we need to ask what it is we are against, what it is we are for, knowing full well that this we is not a foundation but what we are working toward. By working out what we are for, we are working out that we, that hopeful signifier of a feminist collectivity." The question of how online feminists "work out that we" lies at the center of my dissertation.

In examining the operations of the Jezebel comment section, this project takes up the ways that feminism is enacted, negotiated, and policed, from a bottom-up (vernacular) rather than a top-down (academic) perspective. Jezebel is not simply a particularly prominent representation of feminism but also, as I will show, a particularly troubled one, and its comment section embodies negotiations of how feminism should be practiced at a time when it was just entering the mainstream. With this dissertation, I attempt to create a textured portrait of contemporary feminism in flux, and at the same time to point to the radical rhetorical potentials of the comment section, a writing site that until very recently (Gallagher, 2015, 2018; Reagle, 2016) has tended to be reviled at worst and overlooked at best.

Understanding Comments

Maligned yet omnipresent, comment sections occupy strange territory in the landscape of online discourse. In *Reading the Comments: Likers, Haters, and Manipulators at the Bottom of the Web* (2015), Joseph Reagle writes that "comment is a genre of communication" (p. 2). As such, he argues, it appears all over the Web on everything from tweets to Amazon reviews, characterized by being reactive (in response to another text), asynchronous (often at some delay from the originating text), short, and, importantly, "meant to be seen" (p. 2). From this foundation, Reagle explores the different functions that comment takes on in its various appearances: chapter titles contend that comment leaves us "informed," "manipulated," "improved," "alienated," "shaped," and "bemused." In this construction, comment is a flexible and widespread form of communication whose chief point of interest is, Reagle writes, its ubiquity.

My interest is more specific. In an inversion of Reagle's investigation, I focus not on the various contexts in which comment may manifest but on its various manifestations under a single specific circumstance: the comment section. John Gallagher (2018) describes the comment section as "a space for online readers to announce themselves and offer textual responses" (34). Expanding on this definition, Kaitlin Clinnen and Katie Manthey (2019) point to the role of inter-commenter discourse, describing comment sections as "the locations on online content platforms where users may comment on content *and respond to other users*" (p. 32, emphasis added). A key difference between comment sections and social media, Clinnen and Manthey continue, is that while on Facebook or Twitter comments appear below a link to the content in question, comment sections (usually) tethered to the content itself, usually appearing below but sometimes, as in the case of the New York Times, alongside the primary text and, thus, visually

connecting content and comments (p. 32). In this dissertation, I define a comment section as a specially structured and labeled discursive space that is attached but tangential to a site's primary content, in which participants may respond both to that content and to each other.

Although there are several standardized commenting platforms that individual sites may license (e.g., Disqus), many larger newspapers and blogs use their own idiosyncratic systems that shape the commenting experience. Most sites, for instance, allow commenters to post under pseudonyms, but popular news and culture site Buzzfeed (among many others) uses a Facebook-based interface in which comments are not only attached to users' real names but also may appear in the newsfeeds of their friends. Some systems organize comments chronologically, others by "popularity," a somewhat opaque metric that may be defined by number of replies, level of community approval, or some combination of the two. To quantify community approval, commenters often have the ability to "upvote" comments they like and, less commonly, may also be able to downvote comments of which they disapprove. Comments that receive too many downvotes may be hidden, requiring a reader to go through extra steps for access; particularly offensive posts can usually also be flagged for moderator review. Other important variables shaping the feel and discursive possibilities of a comment section include but are not limited to:

- Do comments appear automatically or undergo a moderation period?
- Are there registration and/or verification processes or can commenters effortlessly create multiple accounts?
- Can commenters edit their comments once they have been posted? If so, is there a time limit?
- Is there a set period of time after which new comments will no longer be accepted?
- If a comment is deleted by a moderator, does it leave a trace or disappear completely?
- Can commenters change their usernames?
- Are users' comment histories visible to other users?
- How does the system indicate which comments are replying to whom?
- Are there affordances that allow commenters to connect with other users, as per following on Twitter or friending on Facebook?
- Are there affordances that allow commenters to block or hide other users?

As I will discuss in Chapter Two, the answers to these questions strongly shape how users engage with the commenting space—disallowing editing or keeping the window short, for instance, means that users may not be able to fix mistakes or add clarifications to their comments, but it also means that later readers can be more confident that they are encountering the conversation as it actually unfolded. In addition to these platform-based means of shaping commenting discourse, most sites also have commenting guides outlining proper and improper commenting behavior; violate the guidelines too often or too egregiously and you may find yourself banned from commenting altogether.

Crucially, whereas on sites like Reddit and Twitter all content is user-generated, rendering the boundary between commenter and host permeable, in true comment sections there is a clear, built-in hierarchy between official host site content and commenting discourse. That is, on Reddit a given user has the power both to reply to other people's posts and to author his or her own, moving easily between roles; at the New York Times, columnists can freely comment, but commenters cannot freely write columns. This hierarchy positions the comment section as what I call *paraspace*, a term I have loosely appropriated from science fiction author Samuel Delany (1987) to describe a discursive pocket that "exists parallel to the normal space of the diegesis" in "a rhetorically heightened 'other realm.'" Tangentially tethered to a site's primary content, comment sections are functionally other in their motives, rules, and exigencies.

Visually and functionally separated from the official content, the comments become what Robert Glenn Howard (2011) calls vernacular discourse. The term comes from the ancient roman *verna*, children of slaves who were born into Roman households and could partially participate in civic life but could not, for instance, vote (Howard 2011). Vernacular discourse, then, is discussion that runs alongside institutional discourse without actually being a part of it. Although

in Howard's work on political blogs it is the blogs that are considered the vernacular discourse, I would argue that this relationship is fractalized; a blog may be the grassroots upstart in comparison to the official discourse of a political party, but within the blog itself, the author represents institutional authority and the comments exist in bracketed space. Although Howard argues that the vernacular is a mode that can be adopted and discarded at will, I contend that the architecture of the comment section is inherently vernacular, literally alongside but outside of the structure of the main site. Even when sites provide detailed instructions for proper participation, this only emphasizes the outsider-ness of the comments in that they need to be regulated in the first place.

For many scholars, the purpose of the comment section is secondary to the purpose of the site's primary authors. As the title of his 2018 article "Considering the Comments: Theorizing Online Audiences as Emergent Processes" indicates, John Gallagher takes up comment sections from the perspective of the primary writer. He characterizes comments as "audience response," describing the comment section as "a space for online readers to announce themselves and offer textual responses." This imagining allows fine-grained understanding of audience's role in the online writer's process, but it orients itself away from the activity of the commenters themselves. Although Gallagher writes specifically about newspaper comments, his writer-centric approach is characteristic of most scholarship about blog comments as well; blog comment sections are rarely discussed on their own merits and are often employed as a lens for the blog's "primary" content. In early research, comments were used to perform social network analysis of connections between blogs (Furukawa, Matsuo, Ohmukai, Uchiyama, & Ishizuka, 2007; Lento, Welser, Gu, & Smith, 2006; Mishne & Glance, 2006) and to understand how bloggers negotiate their audience (boyd, 2006; Griffith & Papacharissi, 2010; Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004).

Lori Kendall's (Kendall, 2007) work on LiveJournal bloggers begins to address comments as substantive dialogic content, but the commenters she discusses are also bloggers within the network, and blogging is still treated as the primary discourse activity. More recently, although Sedeke and Arora (2013) point out that dialogue is most often between commenters rather than between commenters and bloggers and that on some visually based blogs the comments constitute the bulk or entirety of the text, their goal remains to understand the blogs rather than the comments. Several scholars have argued that comments are essential to the blogging experience (Menchen-Trevino, 2019; Nardi et al., 2004) but the *commenting experience* tends to be elided.

In "Comment Forum Speech as a Mirror of Mainstream Discourse," Karen Hoffman (Hoffman, 2015) defends the substantive nature of comments, arguing that the comments on newspaper articles about politics were ultimately similar to "mainstream or even elite-driven" political discourse (p. 233). However: her claim that comments sections are "one of the most democratic public spaces in our society" (p. 221)—and, indeed, that as per her title they are "a mirror of mainstream discourse"—elides the role of the commenting architecture in constructing that mirror. A variable as simple as whether comments are sorted by popularity or by chronology can drastically change which comments are engaged with and to what extent, as well as altering how commenters may choose to perform their argument. The role of the commenting space is attended to by Jeff Grabill and Stacey Pigg (Grabill & Pigg, 2012) in "Messy Rhetoric: Identity Performance as Rhetorical Agency in Online Public Forums," where they show that identity is both constructed and rhetorically leveraged in the comment sections of the Science Buzz blog. In such comment sections, they write, "the work of rhetorical agency often happens by way of *sequences* of discursive interactions that build something new" (emphasis mine). Similarly,

Kaitlin Clinnin and Katie Manthey's "How Not to Be a Troll: Practicing Rhetorical Technofeminism in Online Comments" (2019) emphasizes the importance of approaching each comment "not as an individual utterance but as a discursive production emerging from the interactions of users, technologies, and social structures" (p. 37). This connection between textuality and spatiality—the idea that the kind of discourse writers are able to instantiate depends on the particulars of the space in which they write—is at the core of this dissertation.

Autoethnography and the Unstable Record

Perhaps the most difficult thing about writing about online spaces is the way they slide out from under your feet. Although popular wisdom has it that "the Internet is forever," in practice the archive is incredibly unstable. Well aware of the contingency of the digital archive, I saved many posts' comments as HTML, a choice that kept the record of the comment section's content but not, I would later come to realize, of its form. Similarly, the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine, while invaluable for snapshotting a site's content, does not accurately maintain its appearance. Answering a question like "what did the Jezebel commenting architecture look like in 2010?" then becomes a process of digging through screencaps taken for past conference presentations, combing through the archives of sites that used to talk about Jezebel, and searching out controversies that might have been deemed worthy of screencapping by users on Reddit or Twitter. The appearance and architecture of Jezebel's commenting system were constantly being tweaked in ways that seemed, at the time, unremarkable. By looking at a progression of posts from Nick Denton, Anna Holmes, and Jessica Coen, it is possible to plot out the large-scale evolutionary timeline of Jezebel's architecture (see Appendix), but some of the more fine-tuned, granular changes are nearly impossible to find.

I read Jezebel for about two years before I began writing about it academically, and even as I began my study I had no idea how the project would evolve. Keeping the kind of records that would allow me to perfectly re-enter the space a decade later would have been both astronomically time-consuming and improbably prescient. For instance: in what editor Tracie Egan Morrissey claimed was an accidental slip of the finger and commenters vehemently maintained was absolutely not, one particularly protracted and nasty fight between Morrissey and commenter TheScienceGirl was deleted in its entirety. One moment I was following the conversation and the next, when I refreshed the page to catch up on any new replies, it had disappeared. Although I was in the habit of saving notable comment sections, I was not in the habit of doing so every few minutes. Reader forum "Groupthink," which until recently was not a part of my research, was unexpectedly rebooted in early 2013, thousands of posts and their comments wiped clean without warning. The reality is that despite what I might wish, certain forms of evidence, context, and numbers are simply not realistically available or reconstructible.

I approach this project, then, through a hybrid methodology, a combination of textual analysis and autoethnographic approach. To be clear, this project is not an autoethnography—most of the work I do here is based on close analysis of Jezebel comment threads—but it is autoethnographically inflected, disrupting the typically white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, upper/middle-class ways of learning and knowing that have characterized the academy (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). Beyond supplementing an eroded archive, my decade of experience on Jezebel equips me with what feminist scientist Evelyn Fox Keller might call "a feeling for the organism" (1995), allowing me to "identify with the subject of study" rather than positioning myself outside of or in opposition to it (Moyers, 1990). The content of the comment threads is

available for textual analysis, but their resonance, the ways they shaded the mood of other, unrelated conversation: this, textual analysis on its own cannot provide.

I draw, then, on what anthropologist Kathleen Stewart would call my *atmospheric attunements* with Jezebel and its comment section, "an intimate, compositional process of dwelling in spaces that bears, gestures, gestates, worlds" (445). Eschewing binaries and certainties, these attunements instead chronicle the textures and rhythms of "how incommensurate elements hang together in a scene" (452). Atmosphere, Stewart writes, is a kind of capacity, a contingent, momentary constellation of people, places, things, and potentials. Borrowing from Andre Dubus, she casts atmospheric attunement as, in part, the process of "looking for pockets" of such capacity: like a bouncer who, attuned to his bar, can identify assemblages of people, timing, and circumstance on the precipice of trouble, so someone attuned to a given atmosphere's space, inhabitants, and rhythms might anticipate moments of a "space opening out of the charged rhythms of an ordinary" (446). Such a self-conscious participant-observer would be at once embedded and at a distance, carefully regarding an assemblage of people, spaces, and activities of which he or she is a part. My long-term participation in and active observation of the Jezebel community has helped attune me to the eddies of its shifting dynamics, enabling me to identify its pockets and begin to empty them of what they hold.

Even a hypothetically perfect textual record cannot reproduce the contingencies of encountering a comment thread in its own time, fresh and vibrating with context. In a world where an online archive can never be trusted as complete or even stable, scholars studying online writing would benefit from actively integrating experiential methods with conventional ones. Following decades of feminist research (e.g. Campbell, 2017; Keller, 1995), I reject the notion that my person can or should be absent from this text, and as Richardson (1995) argues, how we

write and what we write about are interconnected. Autoethnography "acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters of assuming they don't exist" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Including my voice and personal perspective, then, is both more intellectually honest than withholding it, particularly when I have such an emotional connection to my site of study.

Feminist rhetoricians such as Jacqueline Royster and Patricia Bizzell find such connection to be foundational to feminist research. Royster's concept of "passionate attachments" (2000), from her afrafeminist *Traces of a Stream*, rejects the idea that scholars can or should be objective about their subjects. Consciously subjective and situated approaches, Bizzell writes in "Feminist Research Methods in the History of Rhetoric" (2003), have allowed rhetoricians to "get at" rhetorical activity—particularly that traditionally dismissed by the discipline—in new and important ways, "most particularly in bringing the person of the researcher, her body, her emotions, and dare one say, her soul, into the work" (p. 16). If this project is premised on the value of non-patriarchal forms of discourse, drawing on my lived experience is not just convenient but vital to its success. Following Laura Micchiche in "Writing as Feminist Rhetorical Theory" (2010), I undertake this project aiming for "a writerly ethos sensitive to situatedness, empathic connections to research subjects, and a view of knowledge as always partial and in progress" (p. 175). I embrace the lack of closure in my findings and welcome future work (from myself or others) to deepen and enrich them.

Ethical Considerations

Writing about any online community is a complicated matter. In *The Ethics of Internet Research* (McKee & Porter, 2009), Heidi McKee and James Porter point out that online interactive spaces

such as blog, forums, or social networking sites can be approached in two different ways: as texts published by authors, or as interactions among people. Media researcher Malin Sveningsson Elm writes that the question of who gets to decide what counts as public/not sensitive or private/sensitive is analogous to the literary question of whether the meaning of a text is found in the text itself, in its creator, or in the eye or the beholder (Elm, Buchanan, & Stern, 2009). Am I, the researcher, a reader or an observer?

Heather Kitchin (2002) argues that once information is knowingly posted to the Internet, it should be considered public and open for non-intrusive analysis, claiming that "in the absence of direct intrusion there is no research subject." Media researcher Joseph Walther (2002) agrees, maintaining that studying publicly archived internet material is no different from studying old newspapers. And yet this dissertation is premised on the idea that what happens in the Jezebel comment section is not simply textual production: it is something more personal, dynamic, and alive.

McKee and Porter provide a number of heuristics for deciding whether to seek informed consent for material posted in online message boards. In an adaptation of a grid by Elm (Elm et al., 2009), McKee and Porter chart out the circumstances that are more and less likely to require informed consent along two axes: one running vertically between non-sensitive and sensitive information, one running horizontally between private and public (2009). Instant messaging chats about sexual abuse (both private and sensitive) would clearly require informed consent; an article for a popular gardening blog about when to plant tomatoes (public and non-sensitive) would clearly not. And yet McKee and Porter emphasize that these rough guidelines are not an infallible algorithm—ethical decisions cannot be made simply by ticking boxes on a chart.

My position as researcher is further complicated by my position as a community member. Although with one late exception (discussed below) I never mentioned my research or interacted with anyone about anything related to my project, I did comment on both Jezebel and its linked-but-separate reader forum Groupthink, beginning with occasional contributions in early 2010, peaking that summer with daily activity, dropping back to occasional participation from 2011 to 2013, and then fading to my current level of a few comments per year. Unlike some other commenters, even at my most prolific I did not form tight individual bonds with specific other community members, and I seldom made my own posts in Groupthink (perhaps a dozen total?), preferring to lurk and occasionally comment on others' contributions. Nevertheless, I did consider myself part of the community and would once in a while post in Groupthink seeking advice on personal matters, or weigh in on someone else's dilemma with the context of my own experience. My username is thus tied to discussions of deeply private issues involving my body, my relationships, and my mental health; to reveal it here would be to dox myself and tie all these sensitive personal disclosures to my professional identity. I cannot, then, identify any of my own posts or comments without compromising my offline privacy. I do not, therefore, directly engage with any of my posts or comments, nor with threads inflected by my participation. I focus my attention on (1) contentious threads on the Jezebel mainpage and (2) Groupthink discussions of trollish discourse.

But with one ill-considered post to Groupthink, my subject position became uncomfortably relevant, and I was forced to answer a number of hard questions about my ethical choices to the very people they affect. What happened was this: While compiling my works cited for Chapter Four, I was delighted by the tonal dissonance in creating serious academic citations for commenting handles like "hive vagina: private eye" and "the people's jorts." Thinking that

other members of the Jezebel community might share my amusement, I dashed off a few sentences to that effect and posted them to Groupthink. But the first several comments were not amused. I was getting informed consent before discussing people's Groupthink posts, right? How could someone claiming to be a member of the community violate people's privacy like that? If I were an ethical researcher, I would not continue without getting written permission from every commenter whose comments I intended to discuss. If this were a post made by anyone else, I would cite and link to both post and comments, but to do so here would compromise my personal privacy. The very participation that allows me certain kinds of knowledge an outside researcher might not be able to access also makes me vulnerable in ways that such a researcher would never experience. And it also holds me accountable to the community in ways that are not demanded of an outside researcher, erasing my ability to position Groupthink discourse as "just" a text to be read.

Groupthink is a public space in that viewing its content does not require any sort of account or login. And yet, to these commenters, the idea that Groupthink material should be treated as public was shocking and upsetting—despite knowing that Groupthink is publicly available, they still thought of it as less public than the Jezebel mainpage. Anthropologist Susan Gal refers to this as a "fractal distinction" between public and private (2002). The categories of public and private, she writes, are co-constitutive and context-dependent, and the distinction between them can scale up or down nearly infinitely. That is, a house is more private than a street, but even inside the house some areas are more private than others—we would not generally enter the bedroom of our host without permission, even though we are physically capable of doing so. Similarly, although Groupthink is technically just as public as the Jezebel mainpage, for many it feels like the bedroom of the community, tucked away and intimate. As

Elm points out, "even if they are aware of the publicness of the arena, [participants] may forget about it when involved in interactions" (2009), and finding that the communications created for one audience and context are being used for another can be upsetting. Accessibility, then, is not the only metric to use when deciding what counts as "public."

Based on the response to my post, the current users of Groupthink clearly view the space as a private one. And this is understandable: as of 2019, Groupthink is not linked from the mainpage at all, and even the URL, which used to be groupthink.jezebel.com, is now groupthink.kinja.com—the connection to Jezebel has been severed, and almost the only way to find Groupthink now is prior knowledge of its existence. Back in 2013, however, the situation was very different. Not only was Groupthink accessible via a link next to the Jezebel masthead, but with the rollout of Kinja, Gawker Media also completely changed Groupthink's role on the site, from backroom forum to content farm. One of the highly promoted features of the Kinja system was that each commenting handle now came with its own sub-blog, similar in looks and functionality to Groupthink and to the main Jezebel page. High-quality posts on these personal or shared sub-blogs would be considered for publication on the main Jezebel page. Once on the mainpage, posts received significantly more attention than they would on Groupthink alone: as of this writing, commenter NinjaCate's mainpaged Groupthink post about the racial problematics of Miley Cyrus (Bromseth, 2006) has received 1.6 million views, almost all of which it received in its first month (chritter is a nocturnal feminist mancatfish, 2013c).[5] In the inverse of the social media "context collapse" described by Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2011) in which users forget that their audience includes people beyond their innermost circle, there was a noticeable shift in the tone of Groupthink as some commenters vied to have their posts promoted to a

[5] Though no comparable list was released for 2013, these 1.6 million views would have placed NinjaCate's post eighth on Jezebel's list of their most popular posts of 2014 (Dries).

broader audience; such posts were longer, included more context, and no longer invoked an audience of friends and acquaintances. Yet these audition-like essays were not always the posts selected for the main page; many commenters posted to Groupthink about simultaneous delight at having been mainpaged and bemusement about the offhand nature of the chosen post. This uncertainty contributed to an atmosphere in which people felt that anything they wrote could be publicized at any time. For the first year or so of Kinja, it was fairly common for posts to begin with a plea for the material not to be mainpaged, as along with the larger audience came a larger number of comments to moderate—another new responsibility that came with publishing posts through Kinja.

Jezebel, of course, was under no obligation to respect these requests, and in June 2013, prolific commenter and future Jezebel editor C. A. Pinkham (then going by the handle Ubertrout) wrote a piece in response to complaints about Jezebel putting Groupthink on the Jezebel mainpage without permission. “This isn’t a personal journal, guys, as much as sometimes the posts might resemble one,” he wrote. “If I post something on GT, I'm expressly giving not just Jezebel, but the world, permission to quote me. […] This is how the internet works, guys. If you put something out there, *especially* in a place as obviously public as Groupthink, where ANYONE can just go to the website and look, expect it as a possibility that your stuff might wind up being seen” (Ubertrout, 2013). Groupthink moderator SlayBelle (2013b) chimed in in the comments:

> **SlayBelle:** I know that people like to treat Groupthink as a sandbox, but its not. This is not a private forum. Its not even a locked group. There is literally nothing protecting you from other people reading your words here, or googling your screenname, or heaven forfend, tracking you down through the information you've freely shared on this site. As a mod, I've made this point over and over. We give up an aspect of our privacy, such as it is, to participate in this group. That is the trade off.

In early 2014, she reiterated this in a post of its own: "nothing makes my head explode more than people asserting GT is a safe space community in the traditional sense. Groupthink is a public, Google-indexed space, viewable by anyone with an internet connection. While it is a bit harder to find than the mainpage of Jezebel, *please remember that anyone can read this site*" (Slay Belle, 2014).

In contrast to its relative isolation today, then, the Groupthink of 2013 regularly saw its illusion of privacy disrupted at a variety of levels. And indeed, after the first few affronted comments on my 2018 Groupthink post, several commenters who had been active back in 2013 chimed in to confirm that the environment was much more public back then—and to remind current commenters that even the Groupthink of today is far from private. One commenter who identified as an academic in computer science said that in their field, Groupthink would just be so much data to scrape; another, coming from a humanities perspective, said that given my project it seemed comparable to online discussions of art, which in their work they had treated as a body of text to analyze. And anyway, one commenter wryly pointed out, more people had just read my post about my dissertation than would ever read the dissertation itself.

I find these considerations compelling enough to categorize Groupthink as a public space, not just on a technical level (what Janne Bromseth calls an "outside-position" designation [2006]) but based on the social context of the time (an "inside-position" judgment [Bromseth, 2006]). What remains is the question of sensitivity. Based on interviews with four internet researchers, McKee and Porter (2009) determined two basic categories of sensitive information: that which is sensitive based on the nature of the information (e.g., embarrassing or sexual content or discussion of illegal activity) and that which is sensitive based on the individual person or community's individual views. As I mentioned previously, for this project, I have

avoided discussing threads on sensitive topics—discussions of abuse, loss, physical and mental health issues, or anything that might even begin to point to an offline identity. In the fractally more private space of Groupthink, I have also restricted my analysis to comments specifically referencing trolls or trolling. I believe, too, that the age of the comments is a significant factor; at six years old, these discussions have far less immediacy for their participants than would comment threads from 2019.

McKee and Porter (2009) tie ethical questions to metaphors of space and place—researchers who conceive of the internet as a space, they contend, tend to take a text-based approach, referring to their study site as a medium and their object as a publication; place-based researchers, on the other hand, frame their study site as a community or culture and take people as their object of study. The ethical question in the former case centers on copyright and access, in the latter on people's rights and community norms. My project, however, does not fall cleanly into either category. My concern with architecture seems to position the comment section as a space, but my focus on how that architecture both shapes and is manipulated by the community seems to position it more as a human-based place. And yet ultimately, the foundation of this entire project is the idea that commenters at least partially conceive of their activity as the creation of a public record. By constellating all these concerns within the heuristics offered by McKee and Porter, I judge that the discourse I am using in this dissertation is neither particularly sensitive nor particularly private, and therefore does not demand informed consent.

Administrative Notes

Before proceeding, I would like to make a few administrative notes about the commenting record for consistency and ease of mind. All comments have been copied and pasted; any errors in

spelling or grammar are original, as are all uses of bold, italics, and all caps unless otherwise noted. Relatedly, there are no conventions in username punctuation or spacing. Some users choose put spaces in their handles, some choose underscores, and some have no spacing at all; the inclusion of punctuation including commas, parentheses, and colons further muddies the water.

As discussed in Chapter Three, one of the affordances of the Gawker Media commenting system is that usernames are malleable and can be changed at will. This provides some challenge for a project of this nature; many commenters' names have changed since they left the comment in question, but the old names remain preserved in the reply record: in a comment thread from 2010, one commenter's handle reads as "Rebecca 'Burt' Rose" (the current handle) while replies are directed at "@Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide" (the handle from 2010). Moreover, some commenting handles have changed even within the past few months: "Hello_America: Out For Blood" (October 2018) is now "Hello, America: Find Your Soul" (May 2019). There is some consistency—the URLs attached to each comment in citation remain the same—but it is important to acknowledge that this aspect of the record, too, is unstable. To represent the time period as accurately as possible, my attributions reflect the earliest version of the handle available to me.

Finally, it is crucial to acknowledge the complexity of gender in an online space. Many of the commenters I discuss in this dissertation have referred to their gender at some point, and yet the internet has long been a space where people engage in identity and gender play. Offline, it is polite practice to use the pronouns by which people identify themselves to you, but online to assume good faith is naive. By which set of rules, then, do we proceed? Do we take everyone at their word, or no one? My imperfect solution is to refer to commenters by the pronouns they

have given themselves, but to do so self-consciously, as one might refer to a character being played in a film. In this way, I hope to avoid flattening a highly textured assemblage of performances and considerations.

Chapter Summaries

In the following chapters, I engage in what Mary Queen (2008) calls rhetorical genealogy, a process that looks at digital texts as "a series of evolving rhetorical actions emerging from and circulating through multiple temporal and spatial contexts" (p. 475). Rather than digging into authorial intentions (via interviews, for instance) or analyzing texts as stabilized finished products, this approach focuses on how texts' meanings are structured by ever-changing variables. Coming from this perspective, I approach the Jezebel comments as contingent moments of rhetorical agency embedded in a constellation of time and (web)space. That is, comments on Jezebel come from a past and are aimed at both a present and a future, and they create meaning differently depending on the moment in time when they are encountered by a reader. They are also constructed in response not just to the article immediately above them but to a network of other texts— guidelines, other posts and comments, backchannel discussions, social media, current events—both on Jezebel and off, both visible and in-. But these constructions themselves appear within a constructed space, which attempts to provide guidance and limitations on how meaning can be made. Thus, in order to understand "the cultural practices and rhetorics through which particular representations and interpretations gain validity and power" (Queen, 2008, p. 476) in this space, I approach Jezebel and its comment section from multiple dimensions.

The dissertation is effectively split in two. Chapters 1 through 3 examine the vertical

relationship between the comment section and the primary content of the site, largely focusing on the pre-Kinja time period. Here, I contextualize Jezebel as a member of the feminist blogosphere, examine editor-penned commenting guides, trace the evolution of the site architecture, and focus on the comments on a few controversial posts. Chapters 4 and 5, on the other hand, look horizontally at contentious relationships between commenters, focusing on the first six months after the full transition to Kinja in 2013. Rather than looking at the articles on the main page, here I focus on Groupthink, Jezebel's back-room user forum, which was a popular place for longtime community members to participate in metadiscussion of their Jezebel experience. Taken together, these chapters form a textured analysis of the work of Jezebel's comment section in negotiating feminism on the record.

Chapter One – Dropping the F-Bomb: Jezebel's Indeterminate Feminism

Chapter One lays the groundwork for the work of Jezebel's comment section by contextualizing the site as a whole, unpacking the complicated relationship between Jezebel and its feminism. Operated by individuals who identify as feminists within a company that does not, Jezebel occupies contested space within the feminist blogosphere. In this chapter, I identify what I call Jezebel's indeterminate feminism, a performance that sometimes invokes and sometimes repudiates the righteous outrage of its audience. I outline Jezebel's history, showing how the site's performances of feminism have been imbricated with capitalist concerns since its inception, and locate it within the bloom and wither of overtly feminist sites that preceded and followed it. I argue that although Jezebel exploits its readership from both ends by first performing and then disavowing feminist principles, the rhetorical situation of the Jezebel writers is a complicated one, in which they must balance doing feminist work against the implicit

hostility of capitalism and the explicit hostility of their employer. If Jezebel's feminism is necessarily indeterminate, then, the comment section takes on the role of attempting to pin it down.

Chapter Two – "Commenting Is a Privilege": Architecture and Ownership

As I shift focus to the role of the comment section, Chapter Two traces the divergent evolution of the Jezebel commenting architecture alongside the evolution of the Jezebel commenting guides. Arranging editorial posts about the comment section in chronological order, two separate but clearly marked trajectories emerge. As the comment section proliferated (and public understanding of feminism evolved), editors moved from praising the commenters to providing gentle reminders about decorum to laying down intricate lists of rules and the punishments for their transgression. That is, over time the editors placed more and more emphasis on the power differential between the commenters and themselves. At the same time, changes to the commenting architecture created an increasing sense of ownership and agency on the part of the commenters as they were given more affordances of personalization and control. I argue that the dissonance between the role described and enforced by the editors and that constructed by the architecture of the comment section exacerbated commenter-editor conflict while, as with the indeterminate feminism, ultimately serving institutional ends.

Chapter Three – Building a Better Jezebel: Resistance on the Record

Having established the problems with Jezebel's performance of feminism and the troubled workings of its commenting architecture, in Chapter Three I unpack how commenters enact a counter-narrative to the site's main content. Looking at instances of conflict between

commenters and editors, I show how commenters self-consciously leverage their own on-the-record-ness to course-correct Jezebel's performance of feminism. At the same time that commenters mobilize the commenting architecture against the editors, however, the editors weaponize it against their dissent, resulting in the creation of a contested and unstable record. Nevertheless, I argue, commenters' constellations of resistance constitute what Jacqueline Rhodes (2002) calls radical feminist textuality and help define the values of the comment section as a separate paratextual community.

Chapter Four – Kinja, Trolls, and the Limits of Acceptable Dissent

In Chapter Four, I parse out how Kinja re-oriented commenter attention horizontally, toward relationships with other commenters. Here, I show how the major changes involved in Kinja—most prominently the lack of gatekeeping and the ability to dismiss replies—forced Jezebel commenters to confront and collectively negotiate the boundaries of their community. By tracing Groupthink discussions about how to deploy the term "troll"—a powerful term for silencing unwanted discourse—I provide front-row insight into how the Jezebel commenting community determines what I call the limits of acceptable dissent. These debates, I suggest, are shaped by two competing frameworks for defining trolls and trolling, stemming from conflicting etymologies of the term.

Chapter Five – Troll Protocols: Tactics and Strategies

Having established how Jezebel commenters identify trolls, in Chapter Five, I take up the question of what happens next. Drawing on Michel de Certeau's differentiation between strategies and tactics, I begin to draw distinctions between the institution-serving practices built

into Kinja and the ways the commenters resist them. By relying on the age-old approach of "don't feed the troll," I argue, the Kinja architecture is inherently patriarchal, trapping commenters in a system that denies them agency. For their part, commenters find ways to create pockets of agency, both weighing the consequences of using the "dismiss" button to get rid of objectionable content and responding in unorthodox ways neither precluded by nor built into the Kinja architecture.

CHAPTER ONE:

Dropping the F-Bomb: Resisting Jezebel's Indeterminate Feminism

> *Jezebel is not a feminist blog. It is a site that uses feminism to sell pageviews. The draw has always been the commentariat, not the material, imho.*
>
> —Thereisnofluffy, 2014

Snarky, irreverant, and prolific, Jezebel reigns as queen of the feminist blogosphere. With nearly 10 million unique monthly visitors (Quantcast, 2019), it dwarfs more serious, issues-based blogs. Website traffic ranker Alexa has Jezebel as the 852nd most-visited site in the United States; its feminist counterparts trail at #5,339 (The Mary Sue), #17,323 (Everyday Feminism), and #131,883 (Feministing) (Alexa, 2019). Jezebel has been described by the New York Times as a "leading voice in feminism" (Ember, 2017) and by the Los Angeles Times as a "high-profile platform for a new generation of feminists" (Kellogg, 2013). A ten-year retrospective article in *The Atlantic* asserts that Jezebel "captured the zeitgeist like no other women's publication of its time" (J. M. Smith, 2017). Not all coverage is so fawning: a 2011 episode of the NBC sitcom *30 Rock* lampooned what was clearly meant to be a Jezebel clone, and a 2014 episode of HBO's *Girls* mocked the site by name.[6] Jezebel is a space that for many people represents, fairly or not, the state of modern feminism—as feminist journalist Jill Filipovic says, "it's hard to overstate the impact of Jezebel on feminism's modern resurgence" (Smith, 2017). The conversations that take

[6] In a moment series creator Lena Dunham later called "definitely sarcasm" (Dunham, 2014), main character Hannah Horvath describes Jezebel as "a place feminists can go to support one another, which we need in this modern world full of slut shaming […] I think that you need a place to go and gather up the information that's important to your industry and then discuss it with other like-minded individuals. That's why the comments board is so important to me and why I've made so many e-friends!" (Apatow Dunham, & Peretz, 2014).

place in its comment section, then, take place on a stage that is very visible both to those who subscribe to its version of feminism and to those who do not.

To clarify: "visible" does not mean "respected." Beyond predictable complaints from anti-feminists, Jezebel has faced considerable heat from feminist quarters as well. When Slate Magazine debuted women's site DoubleX in 2009, its very first day featured an article by feminist Linda Hirshman titled "The Trouble with Jezebel," which criticized the site for encouraging behaviors that make the world less safe for women (no longer available; see Clark-Flory, 2009). Many feminists on the Web express distaste for Jezebel's sometimes-lurid approach: for several months, the top ten Google search results for "Jezebel feminism" included "Why Jezebel Has the Wrong Approach to Feminism, Period" (Abrahams, 2014), "The Jezebelification of Feminism" (Henry, 2014), and "Outrage World: How Feminist Blogs like Jezebel Gin up Page Views by Exploiting Women's Worst Tendencies" (Gould, 2010).

Jezebel is functionally the online face of feminism—and yet, nowhere on the site does Jezebel identify itself as feminist. In fact, as I will discuss later, the editors have explicitly said that the site is not feminist and should not be judged as such (bluestocking, 2017; montereyo, 2015; redlightpolitics, 2012; Tolentino, 2015). But as Katelyn Wazny (2010) points out in her thesis on Jezebel, something that walks like a feminist site and quacks like a feminist site needs to accept that it will eventually be regarded as a feminist site regardless of what it says. Lisa Gerrard, on the other hand, argues that women's spaces online do not need to label themselves feminist in order to depict "powerful, competent women—speaking in confident voices and promoting political action, scholarly discourse, vehement challenges to misogyny, and boisterous irreverence" (2002, p. 298).

This chapter attempts to unpick the tangled skein of Jezebel's role in contemporary online feminism. I contend that Jezebel is a deliberately ambiguous text designed to exploit the gap between feminist rhetoric and feminist ideology in order to turn a profit, and that this has far-reaching consequences on both feminist discourse and discourse about feminism. As the editors conduct a delicate balancing act between their personal convictions and the demands of their profit-driven jobs, the version of feminism that they construct on the site becomes both widespread and increasingly problematic, often crossing the line into what some characterize as anti-feminist discourse. I do not attempt here to resolve the inherent tension between Jezebel's feminism and its capitalism; instead, I show how this task is taken up on the bottom half of the page, in Jezebel's comment section. Concerned by Jezebel's slippery ideology, its commenters endeavor to pin it down or, failing that, to articulate their own feminism on the record as a counterweight. In this way, I argue, Jezebel's troubled performance of feminism provides exigence for the formation of what Jacqueline Rhodes calls "radical feminist textuality" as commenters work to instantiate alternative feminist formations within the Jezebel site.

The structure of the chapter breaks down as follows. First, to explain why and how Jezebel matters, I locate it within our understanding of feminist activity in women's spaces online. With a brief history of Jezebel's development, I demonstrate that its feminism's indeterminacy is baked into its very core, first as a mechanism of survival and later as a mechanism of profit—which a survey of more explicitly feminist sites reveals to be a mechanism of survival in its own way. Having established Jezebel's context within the feminist blogosphere, I show how a change in productivity metrics at parent company Gawker Media broadened Jezebel's scope and began to create, even reward, contradictions in its values. In the final sections of the chapter, I lay the groundwork for the next two chapters by showing how

commenters address and attempt to remedy Jezebel's indeterminate feminism.

The Economies of Women's Online Spaces

The field of writing studies has a rich history of attending to what women do online. From the beginning, Gail Hawisher and Patricia Sullivan have warned us not to oversimplify, emphasizing that online spaces are "neither egalitarian utopias nor spaces devoid of communicative power for women" (1999, p. 269). Much of the research from the late 1990s and early 2000s focused on the feminist repercussions of women's everyday digital lives. Lisa Gerrard (2002) reminds us that women have been actively shaping the culture of the internet since the at least the mid-1990s, in everything from women-oriented special interest groups to more general MOOs and Usegroups, and many practices that have become normalized on the Web are at their heart feminist practices, regardless of whether they are identified as such (Davis, 2019). Indeed, many scholars have pointed out that even when they do not deliberately invoke feminism, online spaces may still do the work of rejecting patriarchal and oppressive constructions of women and challenging misogyny (Davis, 2019; Eble & Breault, 2002; Gerrard, 2002). If, as Kristine Blair and Pamela Takayoshi (Blair & Takayoshi, 1999) assert, the Web at large allows women to claim some agency in the production of knowledge, then spaces explicitly set aside for women should demonstrate that agency writ large (Eble & Breault, 2002).

Much work has been done on the role of blogs in women's online experience, demonstrating that they are often unfairly dismissed as insignificant despite providing a personal, reciprocal, experience-centered alternative to male-dominated discourse (Chen, 2013; Haas, Tulley, & Blair, 2002; Jack, 2009). Anita Harris notes that even in their supposedly apolitical forms, practices like blogging and participation in online communities can be understood as part

of a larger set of activities through which young women develop their politics and create "new meanings of participation" (Harris, 2012, p. 214), playing an important role in developing their relationships with their political selves. However: their participation in these practices also highlights the ways these young women are rewarded for being "consumption-focused and on display" (Harris 2012, p. 214), reinscribing patriarchal values.

Properly contextualizing Jezebel, however, demands that we turn our attention to the mainstream commercial women's sites of the decade preceding its launch. Although all of Gawker Media's sites are technically referred to as blogs, Jezebel's commercial origin and scale of operation place it in a different category from the more intimate and personal "contribution to the art of the self" described by Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd in 2004. With a staff of seven to ten (plus, at times, guest contributors) and with posts going up every fifteen minutes for ten hours a day (Holmes, 2008a), and with major advertisers like Absolut and Nike, it arguably functions more like an online magazine. And indeed, founding editor Anna Holmes originally conceived of Jezebel as a direct response to print magazine "glossies" like Cosmopolitan and Glamour (Smith, 2017; Doll, 2013)—its very first post (referred to as its "manifesto") was a deconstruction of "The Five Great Lies of Women's Magazines" (Moe, 2007). In its early days, Jezebel constructed itself as the anti-glossy. The glossies critiqued women's bodies? Jezebel would make "body-snarking" and discussion of measurements verboten. The glossies covered celebrity gossip breathlessly? Jezebel would cover it snidely. Despite protestations to the contrary, Jezebel had much in common with the publications that it used both as fodder and as structure.

The entanglement of women's magazines and capitalism reaches far further back than Jezebel's immediate predecessors/contemporaries. According to Helen Damon-Moore and Karl

Kaestle's study of gender in nineteenth-century magazines, women's magazines have been riddled with capitalist agendas since at least the 1930s' *Godey's Lady Book*, a pricey periodical for affluent women who enjoyed reading fiction, playing piano, and pondering the latest fashions (p. 248). As women's lives and labor changed and women's roles became more synonymous with consumption and household shopping, magazines developed apace. The *Ladies Home Journal*, established in 1883, "featured both an intimate tone and a highly commercial face. If its readers saw this as incongruous, they certainly seemed prepared to live with it" (Damon-Moore & Kaestle, 1991, p. 251). The project of Jezebel was, ostensibly, not to live with it anymore. And yet Jezebel introduced its own capitalist tensions, forcing its commenters to decide whether they, like the *Journal* readers of yore, were prepared to live with a publication that wanted to hail them simultaneously as kindred spirits and marks for profit.

The role of community is a key area of tension in online feminist activity. Charles Ess grounds feminist ethics in community and emotional bonds (2014), and the Web can act as a place where young women use community activity to develop their political identities and voices (Takayoshi, Huot, & Huot, 1999). Drawing on Jo Freeman's discussion of feminist consciousness-raising groups, Pamela Takayoshi et al. write that when women share experiences they make connections; awareness of these threads leads to solidarity and coalition building. In this way, they say, the ways that girls and young women were using the Web in the late 1990s ran parallel to the feminist activism of the 1970s. But women's desire for community is easily exploited, especially online, where many spaces are hostile to women and feminine modes of communication (Herring, 1999; Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002). In her survey of popular women's community sites of the late 1990s, Karen Gustafson points out the ways that these spaces—iVillage, Women.com, Oxygen—exploited rhetorics of community to commodify

women while also constructing them in the "traditionally feminine" role of domestic consumers, both through shopping links and more broadly through sponsorships and article content (2002). With control over the content of their forums, these sites could also direct conversation "in commercially appropriate ways" (Gustafson, 2002), herding users toward non-threatening, consumerist discourse that was unlikely to interfere with advertising dollars.

Perhaps it is easy to dismiss spaces like Women.com, whose CEO once told *Time* that women "are coming online in droves, and they're going shopping" (qtd. in Gustafson, 2002). But Michelle Eble and Robin Breault (2002) defend the mainstream (read: popular, non-feminist) spaces that were available to women in the late 1990s and early 2000s. They point out that the Athenian Agora was not simply a judicial seat but also functioned as a marketplace, interweaving the commercial with the social and political: so, they argue, with these popular women's spaces. In this framework, the commercial bedrock of communities like Oxygen and Women.com does not detract from their ability to foster "empowerment and agency through interactivity" (2002)—in fact, in some ways their complicity in discourses of patriarchy and capitalism make them even more effective spaces from which to undermine those discourses. Although women's activities in these spaces may not be feminism as it is typically defined, Eble and Breault argue that their collective rhetorical practices disrupt traditional patriarchal notions of communication, knowledge, and power (2002). Women engaged in these communities not only create their own knowledge but also define what counts as knowledge within their community, knowledge that because of the readership of these mainstream sites has the potential to be seen by millions of people.

The relationship between feminism and commercialism becomes even more complicated when feminism is being specifically invoked. In her study of online girl power magazine Rookie,

Jessalyn Keller (Keller, 2015) shows how founder Tavi Gevinson's feminism and her personal brand co-create each other. Having repackaged 1990s DIY riot grrrl aesthetics for a new generation, Gevinson also sold them to Urban Outfitters, who sponsored her in a 16-city road trip around the United States complete with lists of "must-have" purchases for those who would follow suit (Keller, 2015). Feminism, Keller writes, "can increase the value of one's brand if performed in a way that is read as 'hip' and avoids threatening the consumer logic of the capitalist marketplace" (p. 283).

This is a key insight for understanding Jezebel. While magazines like Ms. and more traditionally feminist sites like Feministing and Feministe try to make capitalism serve feminism, Jezebel tries to make feminism serve capitalism. As we shall see, Jezebel's feminism is subversive in the sense that insofar as it exists, it does so in defiance of its parent company's preferences. Its "underground" nature, however, keeps Jezebel's feminism from disrupting its capitalism in any meaningful way. As Mary Bandonis and Paul Booth (2017) argue, Jezebel's need to profit from its feminism often ends up maintaining the status quo, and I contend that as on Women.com, iVillage, and Oxygen, Jezebel's community of users becomes the true locus of feminist activity on the site.

Jezebel: A Brief History

Jezebel's pursuit of profit had been entangled with its indeterminate feminism since its inception. The idea for Jezebel came from a friend of Gawker Media owner Nick Denton, the dot-com multimillionaire turned media mogul often credited with turning blogs into moneymakers (Salmon, 2012). Although flagship site Gawker.com's readership was estimated to be about 70 percent female to begin with, Denton was pleased with the idea of a "girly Gawker," which he

felt could capture new parts of the lady demographic, and hired Anna Holmes to develop and run the new site (Nagy, 2013), the thirteenth in the Gawker Media stable. Holmes, after spending the previous years writing for glossies like Glamour, had come to despise their manipulation of women and embrace of conspicuous consumption. Raised as a feminist, she saw Jezebel as an opportunity to intervene in those discourses (Raja, 2013).

Although Holmes herself claimed the label of feminist, Jezebel would not. When Holmes used the term in a memo during the development process, a senior Gawker staffer took her aside to warn her against it: there simply wasn't any money in feminism, she was told (Smith, 2017). Although pageview-based models of the internet meant that blogs could be far less beholden to advertisers than their print counterparts and had much more freedom to critique conspicuous consumption (Ko, 2013), feminism was apparently too risky for the Gawker Media bottom line. If Jezebel were going to feminist, it would have to be tacitly so.

When Jezebel debuted on May 22, 2007, it billed itself as "Gawker Media's new blog for women," and the editors solicited content on a list of topics that ranged from the cheekily transgressive ("people who suck") to the perplexingly stereotypical ("wedding announcements that warm the cockles of your hearts") (Holmes, 2007b)[7]. Despite the non-groundbreaking nature of this early declaration of scope, Jezebel immediately set to work pushing the boundaries of mainstream women's content, beginning with a $10,000 contest to produce the most egregious example of magazine retouching. The winning photo of Faith Hill on the cover of Redbook put

[7] List in full: "general gossip; wedding announcements that warm the cockles of your hearts; bad boyfriends and girlfriends; stuff you see on TV (direct morning talk-show news to Jenny); stuff you read; World Series predictions (direct these specifically to Anna); Scarlett Johansson (direct these to Moe); news about women's magazines (particularly regarding any and all swag/services bestowed upon them by generous luxury goods companies); bad behavior; people who suck; Gwyneth Paltrow; cute animal pictures; fashion victims (direct to Jenny); offensive and/or baffling advertisements; women who hate women; men who hate women; women you feel are beyond the reproach of even a bunch of bitter, unshowered bloggers (for the 5-10% of the time we feel charitable); Oprah Winfrey." (Holmes 2007)

the site on the map, and six months after it launched, Jezebel was pulling in 10 million pageviews a month, siphoning readers from Gawker.com (Smith, 2017).

Over that first year, Holmes' hand-picked team of writers (including Dodai Stewart, Maureen "Moe" Tkacik, and Tracie Egan Morrissey) would create a "balls-out," "wacky," "insider-y" site that published articles at such a feverish pace that at one point three writers at once suffered from sitting-induced hemorrhoids (Doll, 2013). The site's ethos was frank, edgy, and often crass—Morrissey detailed her sexual encounters under the moniker "Slut Machine," and Tkacik once penned an excruciatingly graphic account of forgetting to remove a tampon for ten days, and the site once posted a video of all of the editors drinking on a rooftop and attempting to use a device called a "Shenis" that would allow them to urinate while standing up. Some of what was published (including liberal use of "retarded") would almost certainly not pass muster as feminist even a few years later. Even at the time, certain choices crossed the line even for a blog that did not claim to be feminist. Perhaps most infamously, in June 2008, editors Tkacik and Morrissey were lambasted across the feminist blogosphere for an appearance in a comedy show during which they made drunken jokes making light of sexual assault and claiming to have avoided being raped by being "smart." Although the incident was not technically affiliated with Jezebel, Holmes eventually responded to commenter pressure with a post expressing her disappointment in how the event had unfolded: "the whole thing was a fucking shame" (Holmes, 2008c).

Despite and/or because of these very public growing pains, Jezebel was immensely popular. A post celebrating Jezebel's three-year anniversary pulls together many of its accolades (Holmes 2010): at just ten months old, Jezebel was ranked #22 on The Guardian's list of "The World's 50 Most Powerful Blogs" (Aldred et al., 2008), and in 2009 it was listed as #5 on The

Telegraph's list of "Best Websites: News and Comment" (Telegraph, 2009). Holmes' post quotes an article in Ad Age that praises Jezebel as "one of the few genuinely intelligent repositories of media/marketing/fashion commentary and celebrity deflation." The Jezebel article does not, of course, mention that shortly after penning this praise the Ad Age author suggests that "adventurous advertisers" might be able to ally themselves with the site in order to influence its impassioned "cult" of readers (Dobrow, 2008). A few short years later, sponsored posts would indeed begin to appear.

"Perhaps the biggest sign of Jezebel's impact," writes Jordan Smith in a ten-year Jezebel retrospective for the *Guardian*, "is that it no longer stands out" (2017). The years following Jezebel's debut were full of snappy new feminist blogs—XOJane, The Hairpin, Rookie Mag, etc.—and even the very glossy magazines that Jezebel had been formed to mock began increasing their coverage of politics and developing a feminist-leaning point of view. Since 2015, even *Teen Vogue*—mocked in Jezebel's first week for its "poor-little-shallow-girl" vapidity (Moe, 2007)—has continued to publish trenchant takes on social justice issues; Tkacik calls this the most obvious evidence of Jezebel's influence (Smith, 2017).

To be sure, Jezebel was hardly the beginning of accessible feminist writing online. The loose group of sites referred to as the "feminist blogosphere" predated it by years: both Jessica Valenti's Feministing and Melissa McEwan's Shakesville launched in 2004, and Lauren Bruce's more academically oriented Feministe—"in defense of the sanctimonious women's studies set"—dates all the way back to 2000 (Groetzinger, 2016). Focused on activism and consciousness-raising, these blogs were run by individuals (with staff) rather than outside companies or media groups and tended to be on better terms with earlier forms of feminism than Jezebel, whose relationship with the second wave was mutually dismissive (Aune & Holyoak,

2018). But in broad strokes, the success of Jezebel seemed to signal that feminist discourse was headed for the mainstream.

Funding Feminism

Putting feminism in the public eye is one thing; keeping it there is another. Even *Ms. Magazine*, founded by Gloria Steinem in 1972 and still publishing (albeit quarterly) 47 years later, has yet to settle on a relationship with advertising. In its early days, *Ms*.'s version of feminist advertising practices was ensuring that the same products were advertised to women as were advertised to men. Stressing *Ms*. readers as educated and "decidedly upscale," the publisher courted and won advertisements for cars, electronics, and alcohol, none of which were appearing in women's magazines at that time (Samuel, 1997). After seventeen years of failing to be profitable, in 1989 the magazine switched to a fully subscription-supported, advertisement-free model (Carmody, 1990); by the 2000s, it was advertising again, although only accepting "mission-driven advertisements from primarily non-profit, non-partisan organizations" (qtd. in Pollitt, 2008). Currently, its advertising rate sheet says it only accepts "certain advertising" because its readers are loyal to its "uncompromising principles" ("Advertise with *Ms*.," 2019) but far from the emphasis on non-profits from 2008, the materials now point to Nike's success endorsing Colin Kaepernick's stand against police brutality and the boycott of In N Out for supporting the Republican Party. This dizzying array of approaches shows that even for the most venerable of publications, there is no easy path to making feminism financially sustainable.

Online, matters are arguably even more difficult. Former Feministing editor Courtney Martin (2011) writes that it will always be difficult to sustain sites of feminist discourse on the Web because the work of feminism is fundamentally at odds with online funding structures. The

goal of a feminist site, she says, is to send people out into the world, not keep their eyes on the screen, and for most sites, income from banner ads is just enough to cover technology and hosting fees. As a result, many feminist spaces are just barely hanging on; for instance, the founder of feminist site Tiger Beatdown paid all of her writers out of pocket and once even had to solicit reader donations to make rent (Martin, 2011). Writers write for little or no pay, squeezing it in on top of full time jobs, and still feminist sites struggle to stay afloat: although Feministe reported 100,000 pageviews a day in 2007 (Groetzinger, 2016), as of this writing the site is defunct; the last post on Tiger Beatdown is from 2013.

Even the lighter, more commercial post-Jezebel sites have largely sunk back beneath the surface: Slate Magazine's Double X (est. 2009) lasted less than a year, re-enfolding itself into its parent site and then, in 2018, being absorbed into a broader "Human Interest" section. XOJane (est. 2011), founded by the editor of Sassy, never quite managed to recreate the print magazine's success, and The Awl's women's site, The Hairpin (est. 2010) reached its "natural end" in 2018 (The Hairpin 2018). Nicole Cliffe and Daniel Mallory Ortberg's feminist literary and humor magazine The Toast (est. 2013) folded in 2016, as did essay-based sister site The Butter, run by Roxane Gay, and Ijeoma Oluo's The Establishment (est. 2015), a more serious intersectional social justice magazine, ended in April 2019. While feminist sites certainly continue to exist—notably Sandra Kim's Everyday Feminism (est. 2012) and geek-culture-oriented The Mary Sue (est. 2011)—the inability of even the more commercially appealing sites to stay afloat calls the future of online feminism into question.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the story of Rookie Magazine. Rookie Mag, as it is known, was founded in 2010 by then-fifteen-year-old fashion blog phenom Tavi Gevinson to create an alternative space for girlhood. The site was generally received warmly by both its target

demographic and older generations of feminists, and as mentioned above, Gevinson was able to monetize her particular hip brand of feminism through partnerships with companies such as Urban Outfitters. Jessalyn Keller notes that Gevinson successfully created "a discursive space for a thriving feminist girls' culture," if one that was based on a privileged personal brand that was out of reach for many of its readers (2015). Even so, in November 2018 Rookie Mag joined the rest in the digital feminist graveyard, prompting wistful articles from The Cut, The Verge, Forbes, The New York Times, and more.

Gevinson's six-page farewell letter is a detailed rendering of the tensions between feminism and capitalism: "It has sometimes felt like there are two Rookies," she writes. "There's the publication that you read, that I also love reading, writing for, and editing; and then there is the company that I own and am responsible for" (Gevinson, 2018). She could not, she had discovered, save both; the resources she needed to run the site as she wanted would always come with strings that would prevent her from doing so. Given the choice among (1) charging her readers, (2) selling the site to/partnering with a larger media company, or (3) working with (mostly male) investors who were pushing her to de-emphasize what was already working about Rookie in favor of creating a multi-functional media empire, Gevinson (4) opted out.

It is clear that doing online feminism is inseparable from doing capitalism—and the trouble is that many forms of feminism simply don't sell. Perhaps the answer is, as Martin advocates, for feminist-leaning foundations known for funding offline advocacy work to recognize and support the work being done by online feminist activists (a group from which she explicitly excludes Jezebel) as well. "The proof-of-concept phase for feminist online-movement-building is long past," she wrote in 2011. "Now it's time for a funded feminist Web." Or perhaps this long *in memoriam* reel simply indicates that feminist discourse has moved off blogs and onto

social media spaces like Twitter (Smith, 2017) and, increasingly, podcasts. The Mary Sue, like Jezebel, is just one of many publications supported by a larger media conglomerate (in this case, Abrams Media), and as of this writing Everyday Feminism is experimenting with an optional tiered monthly membership ranging from $7 to $45 a month (Everyday Feminism, 2017). If nothing else, these stories highlight that as objectionable as people may have found Jezebel's approach, Jezebel has survived.

Cashing in: Jezmopolitan and Outrage Culture

Nick Denton built Gawker Media around a relentless emphasis on metrics. From the beginning, each site boasted a banner proclaiming how many posts had gone up in the past 24 hours (Dobrow, 2008), and for years, visitors to the editorial floor at Gawker Media would be greeted by the Big Board, a constantly updating display of top posts and number of visitors. After the switch to Kinja in 2013, this would be supplemented by a running online chart ranking the writers by how many unique viewers they had attracted in the past thirty days and color coding whose numbers were going up and whose were going down (Petre, 2015). A separate metric tracked how individual writers' salaries compared to the number of unique visitors they brought to the site; writers whose dollar-to-eyeball ratio remained too high for too long could be fired (Petre, 2015). This led to an atmosphere in which writers were afraid of Denton and in constant anxiety about losing their jobs (Sterne, 2012).

The change from a metric based on general pageviews to one based only on uniques was announced via memo in January 2010. The system, Denton wrote, would "reward sites which recruit new readers rather than pandering to a well-established clique" (Snyder, 2010). It is a curious memo, declaring on the one hand that "our editorial will be better as a result" of the

change and on the other that the emphasis on unique pageviews "can overstate the value of cheap items with superficial appeal, but which damage a site's reputation" (Snyder, 2010). The changes wrought by this realignment would have consequences across the sites, but those consequences would be particularly meaningful for Jezebel.

The first consequence was the departure of Anna Holmes in May 2010 after pressure from Denton to do more posts about makeup and fewer about politics: "I thought, if that's what he wants—to turn the site into the very thing we'd been making fun of for years—he needed to get someone else to do that" (Doll, 2013). That someone was Jessica Coen, who had written for Gawker.com and whom Holmes described as having a "broader, more commercial sensibility" than she did herself (Doll, 2013). Under Coen, who also personally identifies as a feminist, Jezebel would enter a years-long period of upheaval and controversy during which it nevertheless continued to grow.

On April 1, 2008, Jezebel had featured an article titled "Welcome to the New Jezebel," which announced that Jezebel had been purchased by Conde Nast and would be shifting its focus to feature fashion news, product advice, and generally have "less focus on the issues that dominate the six o'clock news and more on what it means to be a contemporary American woman." Also there would be cats, because "we know you ladies love animals" (Martin, 2008). The revelation that, yes, this was an April Fool's joke relieved the commentariat, most of whom had either panicked at the news or dismissed the story as too preposterous to be true. By 2011, however, the actual Jezebel site offered a social etiquette advice column, beauty tutorials, a feature in which the editors recommended products they loved, and yes, videos of kittens. As Holmes had feared, much of Jezebel had begun to resemble the very magazines it purported to undermine, had turned into what many readers began to call "Jezmopolitan." Brandonis and

Booth call this the "memeification" of women's social issues, pointing out how Jezebel's choices reinforce gender norms and support the status quo (2017, p. 280). Both Jezebel and Gawker.com found that one good way to get pageviews was to post videos of kittens running away from apples or tiny sloths in tiny pajamas—on Jezebel, such posts would often get two to three times the views of more political posts. But an increased emphasis on cute animal videos signifies different things on a gender-inclusive site than it does on a site geared toward women, seeming to evidence that women do indeed prefer the adorable to the analytical.

And yet at the same time, other articles courted outrage. In 2015, the Los Angeles Times lamented that while Jezebel had once been a "smart decoder of women's media," it had now turned its attention to angrily calling out the merest hint of misogyny. "In fact," the piece goes on, "the preponderance of blogospheric female wrath might, collectively, be called the Jezebel Effect" (Daum, 2015). Laying the entirety of "call-out culture" at Jezebel's feet significantly overstates the case, but identifying things as problematic was certainly part of the Jezebel repertoire. A post about a Spongebob Squarepants-branded "Bikini Bottom Shaving Kit" was titled "Toy Lets 3-Year-Olds Shave Their Crotch Like Big Girls," excoriating public grooming pressures without mention of the fact that Bikini Bottom is the name of the town where the character Spongebob lives (qtd. in Mcken, 2011; links to the actual post now redirect to an article about a grill). More substantively, Irin Carmon's well-publicized article about the lack of women on The Daily Show may have been accused of cherry picking to trump up controversy, but it also accumulated nearly 450,000 views (Carmon, 2010). Feminist writers such as Emily Gould found such hand-wringing disingenuous and destructive, accusing Jezebel of whipping up firestorms of righteous indignation that were "great for page-view-pimping bloggy business"

(Gould, 2012). And indeed, with Gawker Media's metrics deemphasizing the development of a loyal community, it was more important that these articles circulate than that they resonate.

If it was lucrative for Jezebel to cater to outraged feminists, it was also profitable to outrage feminists themselves. While many Jezebel posts seemed almost to caricature feminist indignation, others seemed so misaligned with feminist values that commenters accused the site of trolling. In the infamous "Paris consent" debacle, a guest post made the argument that Americans are too hung up on the idea of mutually consensual sex and touching. The choice to publish the essay was eviscerated across the feminist blogosphere—but the post itself garnered 100,000 pageviews and over two thousand comments (Pasteck, 2010). A post in which Jezebel expressed horror that YouTube would host a video of a women getting raped and then posted barely-pixelated pictures of the rape themselves drew nearly 170,000 views (North, 2012) In 2014, Jezebel saw a lot of bad publicity for putting out a $10,000 reward for unretouched versions of Lena Dunham's photoshoot with Vogue. Unlike the 2007 bounty that netted them the Faith Hill photo, commenters said, this Dunham-targeted offer felt cruel and invasive, especially considering that she already faced considerable sexist criticism for her appearance. The post announcing the bounty received over five hundred thousand views and over six hundred comments (Coen, 2014c); the post that included the paid-for pictures hit a whopping 2.3 million views (one of the highest the site had ever seen) and 1.7 thousand comments, most of them disapproving (Coen, 2014a). With enemies like this, who needs friends?

Jezebel's prominence means that, regardless of how well it scores on the Feminist Purity Test, it influences how people perceive feminism. Denton's demand to bring a steady stream of new readers to the site meant that from 2010 to about 2015, the feminism that Jezebel performed loved makeup, kittens, and exaggerated outrage. The emphasis on unique pageviews meant that

Gawker Media sites needed to cast their nets widely, creating content for the lowest common denominator. The people watching the sloth videos might not read the article about the Bikini Bottom Shaving Kit, but they didn't need to; their job was done. In theory, this makes it nearly impossible to get a sense of Jezebel's readers by looking at Jezebel's content. But in practice, it was easy to look at the kinds of posts that received consistently higher pageviews and draw unfavorable conclusions about contemporary feminism.

The trumped-up rhetoric of outrage that drives pageviews is particularly damaging because critics so often accuse feminists of "looking for things to be offended about." But as long as it doesn't say anywhere that the site is supposed to be feminist, no one has to be accountable for the fact that the site's penchant for playing both sides leads to some damaging misconceptions of what feminism is supposed to be about, enabling people to dismiss feminism and femininists as stereotypical girls manufacturing outrage in their spare time. Furthermore, by never claiming the mantle of feminism (and occasionally outright dissociating the site from the term), editors avoid any kind of accountability for what they post. Responses to controversies, on the rare occasions they appear, sidestep the question of feminist performance and focus on editorial defense. The pictures *were* the story, Coen wrote in an addendum on the rape post, so they would not be taken down (North, 2012); the Paris consent piece was posted because it is important to hear opposing points of view (Coen, 2010). As Brandonis and Booth point out, infighting and perpetual dissent and how-dare-you are lucrative for a blog (2017). But even with all the ways Jezebel's now-you-see-it-now-you-don't feminism is grounded with capitalism, there are nuances to Jezebel's reluctance to clarify its position.

A Feminist Infusion

It is not difficult to find reports of Jezebel editors disavowing feminism. In a Reddit discussion about whether or not Jezebel is actually feminist, commenter bluestocking writes that Jezebel is "a women's lifestyle site that a lot of women who happen to be feminist contribute to. They have stated that over and over again" (2017). On the Tumblr blog Red Light Politics, the author criticizes Jezebel editors for wanting to have their feminist cake and eat it too. "They claim they are not a feminist site as the reason why they post "controversial" stuff, which is fair enough," the author writes, although he or she also criticizes Jessica Coen for disavowing feminism on Jezebel but allowing herself to be lauded as a feminist in other contexts (redlightpolitics, 2012). It should be noted, however, that despite the somewhat widespread belief that Jezebel editors have rejected the feminist label on the site itself, searches within Jezebel for "not feminist," "feminist site," "feminist website" and other iterations bring up no disavowal of feminism; nor does searching through the comment histories of Jessica Coen, Tracie Egan Morrissey, and Anna Holmes.

Off the Jezebel website, the editors make their position a bit clearer. The launch of 2013's Jezebel-branded *The Book of Jezebel: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (edited by Anna Holmes) prompted renewed discussion about the site's feminist identification. NPR's Annalisa Quinn, herself an "avid (but critical)" Jezebel reader, acknowledges the site's diffidence by characterizing it as "the closest thing we have" to a mainstream feminist news site; the book, too, she notes, is "carefully unambitious" when presenting its goals despite taking clearly feminist positions on its topics (Quinn, 2013). This read is supported by Coen's remarks on a panel celebrating the book launch, in which she said that many people come to Jezebel for pop culture and fun writing, not for feminist perspective. "But all of that is infused with the feminist

viewpoint," she says, adding that she finds it "very powerful" that people "don't even realize they're reading a feminist website right away (Oputu, 2013). Here, Coen refers to Jezebel as a feminist website but simultaneously refers to that feminism as an infusion—a passive presence rather than an active purpose. In response to an email from the blog Viva La Feminista, Holmes constructs Jezebel's feminism in a similarly inert manner, explaining why she has "consistently rejected" the label: "If your definition of a feminist website is a website whose primary reason for existence is to advance feminist (often academic/activist feminist) conversation—and that's MY definition—then no, Jezebel is not a feminist website" (Veronica, 2013). Rather, she says, it is "[a] website with a *feminist sensibility*, one for which feminist issues are important but not sole reason d'etre" (Veronica, 2013).

Acknowledging a "feminist sensibility" but rejecting the label itself allows Jezebel to claim certain values while not being accountable to other people who hold them. In a longform reflection about the experience of writing for Jezebel, editor Jia Tolentino acknowledged that the site has always faced accusations of "woman hating from a so-called feminist site" (Tolentino, 2015). "The motion of the criticism itself tends to be valid and valuable," she wrote;

> what surprises me every time is the weight attached to this criticism, the sense of actual *offense*, the personal investment, the damningly fatalistic idea that feminist ideology itself, as well as every woman who believes in it, is threatened if a women's website makes a misstep or mistake. (The sense that the label will only invoke a grading rubric—not a gimme, as it is for others, but a gotcha—is one of the reasons why Jezebel, to the long-standing dismay of some readers, hasn't explicitly self-identified as a feminist website; I'm calling it a feminist website now because we are described that way nonetheless.) (Tolentino, 2015)

There is much to unpack here. Acknowledging the label, even under duress, is more than other editors have done, and it concedes Wazny's point that Jezebel is *functionally* a feminist website even if it is not *officially* a feminist website (2010). The idea that avoiding the feminist label keeps Jezebel from being held to a set of objective standards is true enough (as I have argued),

although with "gotcha" Tolentino frames those standards as unfair setups for failure rather than a set of shared values. Framing Jezebel as a "women's website" whose missteps could not possibly affect the overall outlook of feminism completely sidesteps the site's prominence and influence, and Tolentino's surprise that Jezebel's readers are invested in the site and/or in their own feminism is surprising in its own right. Overall, while this statement complicates a profit-driven reading of Jezebel's indeterminate feminism, it also confirms that this indeterminacy is intentionally designed to evade critique.

Gawker Media's Lady Problem

As previously discussed, part of the reason Jezebel was created with a "feminist sensibility" and not a feminist mission statement was that Nick Denton felt that feminism was not profitable. Reading various interviews with and memos from Denton, one gets the sense that although Denton had no problem turning a profit on (tacit) feminism, he also held it in contempt—in one company-wide memo, for instance, he referred to the Jezebel commenters as "a politically-correct mob" (Snyder, 2009). To do (and keep) their jobs, then, writers needed to negotiate not just the tastes of an increasingly poorly defined target audience but also those of a management that did not recognize the inherent value of the work they did.

The balancing act demanded of Jezebel's editors is distilled in a 2013 post titled "Ladyblog Publisher Wants Ladyblog Writer to Stop Writing About Lady 'Quotas,'" in which Coen published an email exchange between herself and Nick Denton. After Jezebel posted an article about the lack of women writers on *Doctor Who*, Denton sent Coen an email with the subject line "Seriously? It's a freaking geek show. I hate this quota shit" (Coen, 2013a). Coen's 527-word reply is illuminating. Coen began by contextualizing the coverage within Gawker

Media, pointing out that (1) science fiction blog io9 was run by women, (2) some of gaming site Kotaku's most successful posts were about gender in gaming/geekery and (3) this particular post had received 275 comments, inspiring "the sort of spirited Kinja discussion [Denton had] been pushing for."

She emphasized the exigence both of Doctor Who ("wildly popular" even with women) and of discussions of women's roles, which was "a big topic right now" not just on Jezebel but in all kinds of mainstream outlets. She points to the "most buzzed about book of the year" being a "feminist tome" written by Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg about the lack of female leadership across industries: "That's veering into quota territory, by your estimation," she wrote, "but the general public seems to find it compelling." The popularity of the topic takes center stage in her argument, bringing concerns back to profitability and warning against missing out on "a very hot topic right now." Throughout the email, feminism is carefully positioned as something *other people* do. Regular women care about these topics, she emphasizes, not just "'strident feminist' gender studies majors." The "vast majority" of her friends "certainly wouldn't call themselves feminists or activists in any sense," but they, too, were regularly posting about these issues.

Tucked in the middle of the email was a small reproof, softened by several layers of deference:

> I mean this very respectfully, but perhaps you're not feeling this broader shift because it is of little personal interest and concern. That's not to say you're ignorant or don't care about ladies or your female friends and family; just that you are likely not drawn to the fact that these conversations are happening on levels far larger than Jezebel. Most men aren't!

Coen used "women" ten times in the rest of the body of the email; the only time she used the softer, fluffier "ladies" was during this critique. This choice operates at two levels: as a cushion for the implication that his privilege (a term that is never used) had left women's issues beneath

his notice, and as a small, six-letter, plausibly deniable container for a seething anger, as manifested three more times in the headline. Having directed his attention to a possible reason for his dismissal of women's concerns, she then placed a band-aid on the wound: he hadn't done anything most men wouldn't do. She ended the paragraph with an exclamation point—an infamous marker of non-threatening emails from women (Tannen, 2013)—and transitioned smoothly back into her argument about the widespread interest in the topic of women's roles.

The careful craft of Coen's reply tells a vivid story about the ways women's experiences were (de)valued behind the scenes at Gawker Media, a narrative that would culminate a year later in another public blast at Denton and the Gawker Media Group. After changes to Kinja removed gatekeeping procedures, someone began posting graphic GIFs of sexual assault in the Jezebel comments. As the only people with permissions to delete comments, the editors were forced to look at these images on a daily basis, and their requests for countermeasures (blocking or recording of IP addresses) were turned down. Finally, after months of rape GIFs and no supportive action, the editors composed a public dressing-down of Gawker Media and posted it to Jezebel under the headline, "We Have a Rape GIF Problem and Gawker Media Won't Do Anything About It" (Jezebel Staff, 2014). While the post itself was published under the name "Jezebel Staff," the editors took to the comment section to express their own anger and disgust at the lack of support they had received. Madeleine Davies and Tracie Egan Morrissey accused Gawker Media of prioritizing the privacy of hypothetical anonymous informants over the safety of non-hypothetical readers and staff (Davies, 2014; Morrissey, 2014), and Jessica Coen called the lack of response from Gawker Media "pathetic" (Coen, 2014b). Five additional editors and several moderators also weighed in, and an hour and forty minutes after the post went live, Gawker Media editorial director Joel Johnson commented to apologize for not having paid

proper attention to the problem. He promised to fix it within 24 to 48 hours: "This is exactly the right thing to do when people aren't paying proper attention to a real problem. […] Proud to work with you all" (Johnson, 2014). "Hey Joel," replied a commenter. "You're an asshole" (janemarple, 2014).

These stories recontextualize Jezebel's indeterminate feminism as at least partially a labor problem. They complicate narratives about Jezebel, highlighting the ways its presentation of feminism and women's issues were shaped by the work environment itself. While certainly clickbait articles have consequences for the larger perception of contemporary feminism, the material and psychological conditions under which those articles were produced are also part of this story. A remarkable feature of the rape GIF story is the role played by the comment section. While it was not unusual for editors to reply to a few comments over the course of a day, this mass participation was unprecedented. While the post itself created a singular united front, the comment section allowed each editor to touch on the aspects of the debacle that bothered her the most. This move toward multivocality is a vital function of the comment section, particularly on a (functionally) feminist site.

The comment section: Pushing back and nailing down

Although editors remained determined to keep Jezebel's feminism indeterminate, commenters did their best to lock it down. While the particulars of the Jezebel comment section's structure and function will be unpacked in detail in the next two chapters, I would like to close by looking at several ways that commenters attempted to create a definitive feminist identity for Jezebel. In "'Substantive and Feminist Girlie Action': Women Online," (2002) Jacqueline Rhodes emphasizes the need to acknowledge the work of textuality in contemporary women's

movements. Looking at the work of women in public online spaces (as opposed to private listservs), she points to what she calls "radical feminist textuality," a self-aware form of activism that exists by constellating a momentary collective identity. In her discussion. Rhodes largely locates this assemblage in the use of hypertext, but I argue that Jezebel's comment section demonstrates a different kind of radical feminist textuality, one that deliberately creates a public record to reshape the performance of feminism that Jezebel offers the world.

While Jezebel's commercial obligations restrict the kinds of feminism it can do to the kinds of feminism it can sell, the commenters often confront the role of capitalism head-on. Such comments put on the record that Jezebel's readers, not simply dupes, are capable of recognizing when they are being manipulated for profit disguised as principle. For instance, in response to Jezebel's post "We're Offering $10,000 for Unretouched Images of Lena Dunham in *Vogue*" (Coen, 2014), commenter littlefish wrote no more than the following: "We're Offering $10,000 for $20,000 of Clickthroughs for Lena Dunham Photos!" (littlefish, 2014). In a comment section full of frustration and dismay, littlefish coolly calls the editors out while avoiding any semblance of outrage. Pointing out clickbait is a way for commenters to perform a self-aware, critical feminism that flies in the face of the characterizations of Jezebel readers put forward by writers like Emily Gould in "Outrage World: How feminist blogs like Jezebel gin up page views by exploiting women's worst tendencies" (2010).

On occasion, the editors themselves step into such conversations to set the record straight. For instance, when Jezebel posted a response to Gould's piece, commenter A Caving Ape requested on-record clarification about Gould's assertion that Jezebel's writers were "just as beholden to advertisers as any other mainstream medium" (A Caving Ape, 2010). Editor Irin Carmon offered a direct response: although Jezebel was beholden to ads in the sense that

advertising was its source of revenue, she said, editors had no idea what ads would be running at any given time and never experienced any meddling on advertisers' behalf (Carmon, 2010a). Accusations of clickbait were sometimes rebutted by reference to the new emphasis on unique pageviews—editors had no incentive to upset their core readers and "trick" them into visiting controversial posts again and again, they said, because those second and third views do not count toward their total. In that same thread, Carmon clarified that incendiary content was actually a less reliable source of outside traffic than, say, cute animal videos, and that the pressure to bring in unique pageviews did not prevent editors from writing about topics that mattered to them, even when such posts did not perform well (Carmon, 2010b). Such an explanation, of course, does not account for the fact that the more controversial posts tended to be discussed and spread by other sites in the feminist blogosphere, thus bringing in uniques anyway. On these occasions, though, the comment section served as a space for clarification and limited dialogue between editors and commenters, providing actual interactivity rather than an illusory version in which reader "feedback" seems to exist on a different, unacknowledged plane.

It is important to note that neither the comments nor the editorial content is a monolith. As one might expect, comments demonstrate a wide range of opinions, some of which support even the most controversial of editorial decisions. And the editors defend their own right to multivocality. In response to repeated commenter pushback on a series of guest posts giving armchair psychiatric diagnoses of the Real Housewives, Tracie Egan Morrissey rejects the ideas that such posts go against Jezebel's values for the reason that there is no such thing as "Jezebel's values": "As for people saying that a post like this is 'against the Jezebel stance on [fill in the blank]...' There really aren't any unified 'Jezebel positions' on anything. All of the writers and contributors have their own thoughts and beliefs on myriad things" (Morrissey, 2010). This

response is particularly striking considering that it appeared on questions about a guest post. Commenters' attempts to lock down Jezebel's indeterminate feminism tended to be particularly pointed when it came to guest content (increasingly common during the first push toward uniques) because there were no clear guidelines on how such content was meant to be approached. Did the fact that Jezebel had run a particular piece mean that Jezebel endorsed its point of view? Or, more to the point: did the fact that Jezebel had chosen to run a given piece mean that it could not wriggle out from accountability for its point of view? While it was understood that the Jezebel editors might not always agree in the finer points of their posts, the idea that Jezebel would go out of its way to publish material that was at odds with its ostensible values was difficult for commenters to process. In responding to a question about a guest post by saying that there is no such thing as an official Jezebel position, Morrissey asserts that Jezebel has no core value set at all, and therefore nothing to which it could be held accountable.

Nevertheless, commenters tried, often clashing with editors about what constitutes "proper" feminism. A post containing a line that mocked men with hairy backs received significant pushback from commenters who felt it was both unkind and hypocritical coming from a site that had built its reputation on criticizing the policing of women's bodies. "Come on Jezzy, you can do better," writes lucystrawberry. "I don't want my boyfriend feel so deeply insecure about his body that he makes a monthly waxing appointment" (2010). (Coen responded: "It was tongue-in-cheek. I think you know this site better than for us having to spell it out for you, which would frankly be insulting your intelligence" (2010f).) Commenters similarly recoiled from a line describing Sandra Bullock's ex husband as "a woman's worst nightmare: the lying, the cheating, the hairline" (Coen, 2010b), with mommy_dearest writing, "His hairline is part of what makes him a nightmare? That seems a bit unnecessary to me" (2010). (Coen responded: "Your

absolute lack of humor is disappointing" (2010d).) When an article lightheartedly reported on a 45-year-old woman calling then-President Obama "a hottie with a smokin' little body" and then hugging him, some commenters expressed discomfort with the treatment at multiple levels: was her age included to make it seem absurd? How would this read if the genders were reversed? (Coen responded: "Wow, guys. I'm a blown away by the overall reaction to this — it doesn't hurt appreciate the absurdity of stuff sometimes, rather than get huffy. Obama's day is pretty rough; this is a dose of levity. Save the outrage for real issues" (2010c).) In these three examples, we see that Coen's feminism has room in it for jokes at the expense of men—perhaps because they are a way of "punching up" at people with more social power. For many commenters, however, such jokes are problematic, treating men's insecurities and bodily autonomy as less important than women's. By characterizing commenters who disagree with her as huffy and humorless, Coen reproduces the dismissive dynamic she resisted with Denton in her coverage of *Doctor Who*, offloading the "feminist killjoy" label onto her critics and sidestepping the substance of the critique.

Very occasionally, the work of registering dissent in the comments received a response in the main content of the site, though such responses still tended toward defensiveness and affirmation of initial choices. An outcry about the tag "Trail of Tears" having been applied to an article about Meghan McCain crying received a rare direct response when the tag was removed and Jessica Coen apologized in the comments (2010e). The outrage over the Paris consent article was so immediate and widespread that Coen not only added an editor's note but also made a separate apology post to address the controversy—although notably, the apology was only for framing the piece improperly and the post itself stayed up. There were also occasions when commenter complaints were addressed obliquely, as when after regular complaints about

provocative, not-safe-for-work images running on the mainpage during Jezebel's coverage of clothing company American Apparel, editor Jenna Sauers posted an article justifying why Jezebel continued running the images.

The Lena Dunham Vogue bounty is a case in which it seems that editors anticipated objections, but to little avail. Coen claimed the bounty was not about seeing what Dunham—"a woman who trumpets body positivity, who's unabashedly feminist, who has said that her naked body is 'a realistic expression of what it's like to be alive'"—looked like without Photoshop but rather about Vogue itself, and "what *Vogue* decides to do with a specific woman who has very publicly stated that she's fine just the way she is" (Coen, 2014c). Commenters claimed that Jezebel was using a thinly veiled excuse to attack someone they disliked, that it was leveraging the very body-shaming tactics it had previously claimed to abhor, and that repeating the same stunt that had put the site on the map seven years before simply proved that Jezebel failed to understand that the feminist conversation had evolved.

A lengthy response by commenter Bless Us All embodies the radical textual feminism displayed by many of these comments, both individually and when taken, as intended, as a networked whole. Bless Us All (2014) began by constructing the comment section as a space of public record in which participants had been rhetorically hailed—one might say as an agora of sorts.

> **Bless Us All:** And how does a person respond to something like this? How does a woman who started reading this website as a teenager, who used to seek refuge here when her ideas about gender and equality were shot down by her friends, peers, and sometimes even family, who for some reason imagined this place as being a center for social education and self-reflection, a SAFE place on an internet full of body-snarking, misogynistic trolls, respond?

By constructing this paragraph in the generic third person rather than as a direct response from Bless Us All herself, Bless Us All became a representative rather than an individual; the question was not how she was to respond but how one was to respond. In the next sentence, she further clarified the set of Jezebel readers she purported to represent, maintaining the third person throughout. These readers are were the kind of people who delight in revealing the bodily "flaws" of celebrities who are already subjected to cruel commentary about their bodies but the kind of people who perceived Jezebel as a respite from such discourse. She invoked a version of Jezebel that aligned with her own values, providing an alternative vision of what the site could be. And yet she also took care to demonstrate an awareness of her role in Jezebel's economy and ecology:

> **Bless Us All:** I know that one reader doesn't matter to you. I know that however important Jezebel was to me over the years, my clicks and readership and comments are nothing to Gawker Media. And I know that threats like, "This site has changed and I am NEVER coming back," are often hollow and always irritating and never, ever taken seriously by the powers that be.

This calm acknowledgment of the power imbalance put her self-awareness on the record: no delusions of grandeur here. Commenters, in the grand scheme of things, were powerless in the Gawker Media structure, and pretending otherwise would turn justifiable outrage into confirmation that the feminist readers of Jezebel had an "irritating" and inflated sense of their own importance. Bless Us All, she argued implicitly, understood where the Jezebel editors are coming from and understood her place.

> **Bless Us All:** I have learned a lot from the kinds of articles you publish on this website, and even more from your regular commenters. So I'd like to take this opportunity to speak up, if only on principle.

Although still writing in the second person, Bless Us All here expanded her audience addressed to include the community of commenters themselves. Through this lens, the pragmatism of the previous paragraph takes on a dual function as a rallying cry, pointing to the way that Jezebel devalues its community. Even more than the main site content, she said, the comments provide an education, one of which this comment, too, was now a part. Bless Us All contributed to a record independent from and, indeed, in opposition to the values expressed by Jezebel as a whole, and she positioned the comment section as a place where people can learn a different kind of feminism from that practiced on the top half of the page. Bless Us all, after all, still had principles.

For most of the remaining 842 words of her comment, Bless Us All addressed specific points from Jezebel's post. Using a block quote/rebuttal structure and linking several times to previous Jezebel articles that substantiated her claims, she constellated Jezebel's contradictory ideological positions to create a record of the site's inconsistency. She also again invoked the comment section as record, pointing to the crop that the bounty had sown:

> **Bless Us All:** And, "there's nothing to shame here"? Really? Look at your comments section. Peppered throughout the general shock and outrage of your readership, I've seen multiple insult threads with pictures of potatoes, sacks, etc. and cries of "lol do not want." But that's not your intention, here. No. You are "very clear" about that. You're just specifically inviting people to come in and do a compare and contrast over the image of a woman who committed the unforgivable crime of having a body that the media decided to alter, just like every other body on the cover of *Vogue*.

Here, the comment section itself provided evidence of the disingenuousness of Jezebel's intentions. In pointing to those who followed the path Jezebel set out for them, Bless Us All uses the comment section's overall multivocality to highlight the unity of the critical voices, outlining, as per Rhodes, a temporary constellation. After pointing out that despite a recent

increase in controversial and "problematic" decision-making there had been no apology forthcoming "about ANYTHING," she closed with her intention to leave the site for good.

> **Bless Us All:** As I said, I know that one reader doesn't matter to you, and from a business standpoint, maybe it shouldn't, because you stand to make a lot of money from the hits this and any further articles on this issue will get you. But I can't come here anymore. I'm sure the door'll hit my huge flabby ass on the way out but I'll be sure to get some photos for you guys to run, you know, for feminism.
>
> Peace.

Bless Us All closed by circling back to the rhetoric of her second paragraph, this time connecting explicitly to the ways that Jezebel's capitalism had failed its feminism. As a message to the editors, it reads as the kind of ostentatious leave-taking known around the internet as a "flounce." As a message to the other commenters, it implicitly points to the changes that might be wrought if enough individuals left to actually hurt the bottom line.

Although the rhetorics of Jezebel's commenting architecture will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, I would like to close by pointing to the ways that the commenters mobilized the new commenting architecture in the service of radical feminist textuality. Under the Kinja system, the more response a comment receives—either through replies or upvotes—the more visible it becomes, and Bless Us All's comment's 55 replies and 568 upvotes were enough to propel the comment to the top. More interesting, though, was the public and deliberate effort to push it there, with twelve different commenters mentioning their desire to bump Bless Us All's comment to the top. As Joanbeam wrote, "It *needs* to be seen, read, digested — and perhaps even acted upon, one fine day — by the powers that be. It's as simple as that" (2014). By deliberately and collectively leveraging the affordances of Jezebel's commenting architecture, the commenters were able to effectively turn the site against itself to ensure that Bless Us All's

articulation of their collective complaint would stand as the most prominent record of reader response, front and center and un-ignorable by visitors and staff. "In their negotiation of structure and fluidity," Rhodes wrote, "radical feminist texts emphasize temporary positionality and the use of available technologies" (2002, p. 128). On its own, Bless Us All's comment approaches radical feminist textuality, but it is this web of collective action that truly shows how the commenters reshape Jezebel's feminism to suit their needs.

A Feminist Infusion, Revisited

In *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism* (2018), Catherine Rottenberg describes her fascination with the simultaneous increase in public figures identifying themselves as feminist and decrease in usage of historically foundational feminist keywords: "equal rights, liberation, and social justice" (p. 5). Instead, she writes, these self-identified feminists were using a new vocabulary: "happiness, balance, responsibility, and lean in" (p. 5). This new feminism, Rottenberg argues, operates hand in hand with neoliberalism, which relentlessly converts "all aspects of our world into 'specks' of capital, including human being themselves, produc[ing] subjects who are individualized, entrepreneurial, and self-investing" (p. 7). This re-orients the feminist project around work-life balance and career advancement: the successful feminist is one who has it all, and in the corner office, too.

This is not precisely what is happening on Jezebel—while Jezebel editors' coverage of Sheryl Sandberg's feminist career advice *Lean In* (2013) was generally favorable,[8] equal rights, liberation, and social justice remained part of Jezebel's working vocabulary. But if Rottenberg's new feminists conscript feminism into the service of neoliberalism by applying it too broadly,

[8] Many commenters disagreed and pushed back on "lean-in feminism" as beneficial to corporations rather than women.

Jezebel's "feminist infusion" does much of the same work by refusing to apply it at all.

One might ask whether there is, after all, anything wrong with this infused approach. If Rottenberg constructs contemporary feminism as a Trojan horse packed with neoliberalism, could Jezebel's approachable-yet-evasive flirtations with social justice issues package feminism in a horse of its own? After all, as Lane (2015) points out, despite feminism's recent resurgence many young women are still reluctant to associate themselves with the term—see, for instance, the confession in the very first line of my introduction. Perhaps there is something to the concept of slipping feminism into innocuous content like a parent sneaking vegetables into macaroni and cheese. After all, argues a 2013 post by Jezebel editor Tracy Moore: "Feminism is absolutely a globally recognized way to effect change, but there's another way: By doing the same stuff at your intersection of the world, with or without calling yourself a feminist" (Moore, 2013).[9] If feminism is potentially scaring people away from doing important work and if, as Moore contends, debate over the particulars of membership in the club requires a certain level of privilege in the first place, perhaps feminism as a term has indeed "reached her expiration date" (Moore, 2013).

Read through Moore's lens, Jezebel's refusal to accept the feminist label makes it more feminist, not less, enabling those who are concerned about women and social justice to expend their energy on enacting change rather than litigating boundaries. Certainly, enacting a set of principles does not require that those principles be named. And yet the power of naming is endemic to the feminist movement: fifty-six years ago, Betty Friedan ignited modern feminism

[9] There are, of course, many advocates for justice who have never accepted the term; many women of color in particular have found their interests ill-represented by a movement that often serves white, heterosexual, middle-class ends. From Patricia Hill Collins, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought": "One significant difference between Afrocentric and feminist standpoints is that much of what is termed women's culture is, unlike African-American culture, created in the context of and produced by oppression" (p. 756).

through the act of articulating "a problem that has no name" (Friedan, 1963). The label "feminist" is not beside the point of feminism; it provides a banner to rally behind, a tent to gather beneath, a grain of sand for the center of the pearl.

Here, then, we return to Rottenberg's neoliberal feminism. In the inverse of Rotterberg's emptied-out signifier, Jezebel's tacit "feminist infusion" allows feminism to become a matter of individual concerns. By claiming on a supposedly feminism-infused site that "there really aren't any unified 'Jezebel positions' on anything" (2010), Tracie Egan Morrissey contends that feminism is what you make it, a set of individual choices for which there is no accountability. Like evangelical Christianity's personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a personal relationship with feminism becomes unassailable and invulnerable to judgment. Without its communal nature and the accountability that such collaboration requires, feminism is in danger of becoming the "individualized, entrepreneurial, and self-investing" practice that Rottenberg describes. In neither explicitly claiming nor explicitly eschewing feminism, Jezebel damages the effectiveness of the community that already gathers under that name. The insufficiency of the feminist infusion becomes all the more glaring in light of Jezebel's existing association with the term: with national news organizations regularly using the label, the idea that feminism could be unobtrusively "snuck" into Jezebel's content is disingenuous at best. Jezebel's obstreperous comment section is, in fact, evidence that the label cannot be so easily abandoned. One could even argue that in provoking these endless online debates about the finer points of proper feminist performance, Jezebel becomes not simply indeterminately feminist but actively anti-feminist, encouraging semantic knife fights that replace real, material change.

To this last point I bring three caveats. First, materially speaking, many commenters admit to reading Jezebel at work, on public transportation, or under other circumstances in which

offline activism is unlikely to be a viable alternative to leaving a comment. Second, commenting and offline activism are not mutually exclusive, and there is no need to assume a binary relationship between the two. Finally, there is evidence that online political participation not only coexists with but actually promotes "boots-on-the-ground" activism (Bond et al., 2012; Vie, 2014; Goodling, 2015). Further, I would argue that such discussions are ultimately pedagogical in nature: it was in the Jezebel comments that I first encountered the concept of intersectionality, the idea that the patriarchy harms men, and the notion that my white, cis, able-bodied voice did not need to be welcomed into all conversations. The time spent composing these worldview-shifting comments was not, in my lived experience, wasted by the authors, and other commenters (e.g. Bless Us All, above) report finding the comment section similarly educational. Consciousness-raising has been an explicit part of feminist rhetorical practice since the 1970s (see Sowards & Renegar, 2004), and such activity is no less powerful for taking place in a comment section rather than a rec room. In the end, by withholding accountability and treating feminism as an individual journey, Jezebel's "feminist infusion" constructs its readers as specks ready to be mobilized by the Gawker Media machine. By collaboratively reconstructing Jezebel in connection to the feminist label, the commenters reclaim their collective identity.

Conclusion

Jezebel offers an extension and a heightening of questions that have shaped our understanding of women's online spaces for the past twenty years. How are mainstream, profit-oriented spaces commandeered for feminist activity, and how might such activity challenge our ideas of what feminism looks like? Women's sites need not be explicitly feminist to do feminist work (Gerrard 2002), but Jezebel's relationship with feminism is more complicated than a simple disavowal. In

order to exist, early Jezebel's feminism had to go unnamed and unclaimed, and as time passed and company priorities shifted, that indeterminacy became a part of the business model. Yet the tensions and pressures experienced by the editors are present between the lines, complicating a simple narrative of crass exploitation. No one would expect a sports columnist to represent the "official sports columnist position," and yet Jezebel writers are judged as though they are avatars of feminism itself. This is perhaps part of the representational metonymy often experienced by marginalized groups, in which, for example, a woman who is bad at math becomes evidence that all women are bad at math. But to pretend that Jezebel does not court both controversy and visibility predicated on being perceived as feminist would be disingenuous. If Jezebel truly wishes to reject the feminist label, it has its own megaphone at its disposal.

Jezebel's success means that one of the most widespread representations of feminism is also one of its most problematic. By withholding clarification about both ideology and the ultimate function of the site, Jezebel at best manages to both appeal to everyone and make everyone just angry enough to guarantee a steady stream of pageviews. At worst, the more ardent feminists will leave and go somewhere else, and Jezebel will be filled with the same kinds of comments you find anywhere else on the Web, since that is where they are getting their readers. In either case, feminism loses. In either case, capitalism wins.

In commenter interactions, the editors protect the site's ideological ambiguity, heading off lines of critique and interrogation that attempt to hold them accountable by reframing the conversation around questions of decorum and genre. When Tolentino writes of her shock that readers take Jezebel's missteps so personally, she sidesteps the fact that Jezebel is foundationally about women's identities and ideologies. If Jezebel shapes the ways that feminism is perceived and received in the wider world, then feminists have a material interest in the nature of that

shape. With little recourse to change things from the top, readers use the comment section as a platform for what they feel is a high-stakes grassroots resistance.

Jezebel's comment section provides a counterweight to the main content, creating a multivocal counter-record that performs feminism in alternative ways. The character and effectiveness of that performance, however, is structured by the architecture of the comment section, which, like Jezebel's content itself, is provided by Gawker Media to serve a profit-driven agenda. The question of how architectural affordances—pre- and post-Kinja—shape the discursive possibilities of Jezebel's comment section will form the backbone of the rest of the dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO:

Commenting Architecture and the Battle for Ownership

> *Do you guys honestly believe we read Jezebel for the posts? Seriously, I don't care of you guys are getting *~*married*~* and why do people still booty call me, and what dress should I wear and all that bullshit. I sift through those posts in order to read intelligent, funny commentary from other Jez commenters on stories that are important to me.*
>
> --Anonymous email response to 2009 April Fool's Day prank announcing the shutdown of Jezebel comments

> *Commenting is a privilege, not a right. […] This is our website, and we will moderate it as we see fit.*
>
> --Editor-in-Chief Jessica Coen, in 2010 commenting guide "The Rules of the Road"

In May 2008, the *New York Times* published an article about the Jezebel commenting community. Opening with an account of a skirmish between readers, author Lauren Lipton (who, the article tells us, has commented on Jezebel herself) paints a picture of the comment section as a cool kids' club, critical and cliquish, where the long-suffering editors spend an unheard-of amount of time participating and moderating contentious comments (Lipton, 2008). The next day, Anna Holmes posted on Jezebel to defend her readers—the *Times* headline: "Not On Our Blog, You Won't"; the Jezebel headline: "Yes, On Our Blog, You Will"—calling the Times piece unfair and arguing that any commenter-editor tensions were simply the result of the comment section's exceptionally fast growth. "Jezebel readers are funnier, more vibrant, opinionate, impassioned, whip-smart—and yes, *infuriating*—than the *Times* made them out to be," she wrote. "I just wish that the commenters had taken center stage a bit more. They—*you*—deserved it" (Holmes, 2008d).

Although all Gawker Media sites used the same architecture, Jezebel's comment section was inhabited differently. It took less than ten months for Jezebel to become the top-commented

blog in the Gawker Media Network (Holmes, 2008a). Just six months after Jezebel's launch, the contributions of the top ten commenters ranged from 1,141 to 3,363 each (dodai, 2007), and a little over one year later, comment moderator Hortense Smith published a list of the most prolific commenters of 2008, a list that started with Westvillagegirl at 4,276 and ran all the way up to Penny Plastic (Archetype) with an astonishing 14,315 (Smith, 2008). A chart released on the site's third anniversary showed that Jezebel was receiving about twice the number of comments as the other eight major Gawker sites *combined* (Holmes, 2010a). And interactions spilled over onto other sites and into offline life—there were Facebook groups, alternative chats and blogs, and local meetups—a group of fifteen Jezebel commenters even took multiple vacations together, including trips to Las Vegas and Dollywood, and remain close twelve years later (Beck, 2019; Lipton, 2008).

Despite Holmes's staunch defense, however, the relationship between commenters and editors would become increasingly strained. Where other Gawker Media sites each had a single comment guide, Jezebel had at least a dozen, increasing in complexity over time, as well as multiple smaller posts to aid in controlling commenter discourse. At the same time, the Gawker Media commenting architecture underwent over a dozen changes over the course of six year, ranging from minor tweaks to major renovations.

In this chapter, I tell these two separate but intersecting stories: that of the evolution of Jezebel's commenting guides,[10] and that of the evolution of Jezebel's commenting architecture. Each set of structures is intended to shape commenter participation in particular ways, and I argue that as over time the messages communicated by each diverged more and more, this dissonance fed conflicts between commenters and editors about who and what the Jezebel

[10] A timeline is provided as an appendix.

comment section was for. To highlight this slow uncoupling, I tell the story chronologically, beginning with Jezebel's launch in 2007 and moving year by year to the cusp of the introduction of Kinja in 2012 (which will be taken up in the next chapter). Ultimately, I show that as the editors sought more and more control over the nature of the comment section, the architecture was handing more and more agency over to the commenters themselves. In deploying what Barbara Ley (2007) calls the "architecture of commitment" to create both a loyal reader base and quality secondary written content, Gawker Media stoked the fires of conflict over who was truly entitled to ownership over the Jezebel site.

Architecture, Commitment, and Profit

It is important to note that all sites in the Gawker Media family shared the same commenting structure—none of this architecture was designed for the specific exigencies of the Jezebel site and community. The constant shifts in the structure of the comment system, however, do demonstrate that Nick Denton and Gawker Media were keyed in to the vital role of the comment system in creating a dedicated user base, and to the ways that elements of the commenting architecture could be manipulated to alter the commenter-website relationship. In the early days of the Web, Howard Rheingold (1993) asserted that people go to particular websites more for their interactive features than for their content. Barbara Ley (2007) has seen the same more recently; in her study of an online pregnancy and mothering group, Ley identifies what she calls the architecture of commitment, the aspects of the social and technical design of a site that affect people's level of investment. Unlike "stickiness," which involves simply keeping people on the website for extended periods of time, the architecture of commitment encourages people to actively contribute and commit themselves to the space; commenting or peer-to-peer engagement

is crucial to this. The affordances of an online community, Ley argues, shapes how its users come to feel about the space and about each other. Architecture that encourages commitment gives participants the ability to respond directly to each other; the easier this is to do, the more likely it is that people will come back. The level of commitment also depends on how foregrounded the user generated content is, and how much users are able to pursue their own agenda/agency rather than the agenda of the site itself. Indeed, I repeatedly encountered evidence consistent with Rheingold's and Ley's views during the course of my study.

Shifts in website architecture can provide new affordances in which relationships and identities play out, such as when social network MySpace introduced the Top 8 Friends function and in doing so changed how people conceived of their pre-existing relationships (boyd, 2006). But architecture on its own is not deterministic; the media ideologies people bring to a given space matter as much as the affordances of the space itself (Gershon, 2010). I contend that by bringing in affordances that already have media ideologies attached to them, Gawker Media is tapping into pre-existing schemas of behavior and patterns of use that may or may not line up with their goals. Even when Gawker does introduce novel affordances, commenters form their idioms of practice (Gershon, 2009) based on the activities of their individual communities. It is, therefore, very difficult for the Jezebel editors to simply legislate the comment section into specific modes of discourse, particularly when community practices were formed under different expectations.

David Beer (2009) pushes for a complicated understanding of participation, one that acknowledges how the much-vaunted "Web 2.0" embeds users within relations of power—the term Web 2.0, after all, entered the lexicon at a business conference as a way to think about harnessing user contributions for profit. Whatever else they may do, comment sections provide

free, value-added content for the site. User guides, then, are often part of regulating the quality of that content. In her study of the ways that membership and community were invoked in user guidelines of early women's websites, Karen Gustafson (2002) finds that emphasizing joining and registration not only encourages heavy investment from the beginning but also increases adherence to pre-specified community standards and practices.

In order to post comments on any Gawker Media site, a would-be commenter had to pass an audition process to make sure their contributions would be up to snuff. This audition system successfully branded Gawker comments as must-read supplements to the main material (or, as mentioned in the epigraph, as a replacement). Thus, comments did not simply develop a committed group of reader-participators but were also commoditized as no-cost value-added content across the Gawkerverse in what Axel Bruns (2008) calls *produsage*: the hybridization of user and produce in which participants create value by their very activity. On Jezebel, comments were often turned into posts through features like the Comment of the Day or the Reader Roundup or the Pissing Contest, a challenge for readers to share their best/worst/funniest stories on predetermined topics like "worst roommate" or "strangest celebrity experience." Such posts generated hundreds of comments and tens of thousands of pageviews for minutes of effort on the part of the editors. From this perspective, the audition system, the commenting guidelines, and the architectural structures are all nothing more than quality control for unpaid labor.

Denton's reigning paradigm is not community, and the comment system has been designed and implemented accordingly. As discussed in Chapter 2, when Jezebel's editors were being forced to spend their days looking at GIFs of women being raped, Denton refused to back down on his anonymity policy because it might compromise the ability of hypothetical tipsters to leak information (Jezebel Staff, 2014). In a 2012 interview with CNN, Denton outright rejected

the possibility of an upvote/downvote system, saying that the Gawker Media administrators "don't really believe in in the democratic process of decision-making when it comes to discussion" (qtd. in Gross, 2012). For instance, while Jezebel had made lots of money off readers' outrage about the sexual harassment claims against American Apparel CEO Dov Charney, he said, that outrage would prevent Charney from ever coming to the comment section to defend himself against the accusations: "If you put it to a vote, 90% would vote to ban him. They hate that guy. If Dov Charney went into the Jezebel comments, he'd be torn limb from limb; his limbs aren't all that would be torn off" (qtd. in Gross, 2012). That is, the ladies of Jezebel cannot be trusted with an upvote/downvote system because they are too emotional to use it with integrity. Beneath the twin stories of commenter guidelines and commenting architecture, then, runs another shadow story: that of comment commodification.

2007: A snarky little slumber party

When Jezebel launched on May 22, 2007, one of its first posts was an invitation to comment—or, to be more precise, an invitation to audition to comment. As on other Gawker Media blogs, comments on Jezebel required an extra level of gatekeeping: for their comment to actually appear, a potential commenter had to pass an audition, posting "an interesting, substantial or highly amusing comment" for the editors to judge (Holmes, 2007a). Once approved, the commenter would receive full posting privileges on the site unless banned from doing so, ban-worthy sins defined as being "excessively self-promotional, obnoxious, or even worse, boring" (lock, 2007). The audition had many practical functions, among them discouraging disruptive and/or trolling posts; building and protecting Gawker Media's reputation as the destination of choice for smart, funny people; and creating an exclusive clubhouse feel that would lead to

higher levels of effort and investment. “We only approve the comments we love,” Holmes wrote, “so make sure you’re adding something of quality to the post” (2007a).

In this early period, the editors overtly embraced the comment section. While the main Gawker site would regularly conduct commenter “executions” to publicly ban commenters who had run afoul of the editors, in July Jezebel’s Moe Tkacik jokingly followed suit by nominating seven Jezebel commenters to be banned for faux offenses such as defending Tkacik’s ex-boyfriend’s favorite movie. Tkacik tartly points out that unlike the “medieval monarchs” at Gawker, the Jezebel editors “try to be nurturing because emotional intelligence is one of women's foremost assets in the workplace” (Moe, 2007b), and although her statement is clearly tongue-in-cheek the effort to differentiate the spaces is real. In August 2007, Dodai Stewart published a post for the sole purpose of expressing affection toward commenters and encouraging other readers to join “our snarky little slumber party” (2007). While it is plausible that the post was motivated by a larger Gawker Media push toward building up the commenting base, the affectionate headline (“Dear Jezebel Readers: We Love You More Than We Can Say”) and hyperbolic tone (“We’re nothing without you, and we’re not afraid to say it”; “You honestly have no idea how much we appreciate your input”) paint a picture of a warm, intimate, and symbiotic relationship between commenters and editors.

Although the location of the comments clearly positioned them as subordinate to the editors, the architecture involved in commenters’ ability to “follow” other commenters disrupted this hierarchy. Where Facebook required both users to agree in order to connect their profiles and become “friends,” both on Twitter and on Jezebel, “following” was unidirectional—someone you followed was not required to follow you back. Once the person in question had been

followed, however, any recent comments they had left would appear scattered in among the posts, right alongside the content produced by the editors.

A list of a commenter's followers (and those whom they followed) could be found under their profile. Although profiles were minimal and did not involve any customized text, clicking on a commenter's username would take you to a page that contained their comment history and followers list, as well as, for a time, links to send them a private message. In the event that someone made a comment that did not seem to be in good faith, both follower count and comment history could be used to determine whether said commenter seemed to be a community member in good standing or a troll.

Significantly, this public profile also meant that the commenting system on Jezebel fit into the contemporary definition of a social network site. In the seminal "Social Network Sites: Definition, history, scholarship," danah boyd and Nicole Ellison define a social network site as a website in which users accumulate a list of connections that are displayed on a personal profile and can navigate to and view the profiles and connection lists of other users (boyd & Ellison, 2007). By enabling commenters to follow each other and see each other's lists of followers, Jezebel definitionally grouped its comment section with such burgeoning sites as Twitter and Facebook.

This connection had enormous implications for how commenters would approach the Jezebel space. Particularly in those early days, social network sites were made up of entirely user-generated content; without a steady stream of people Tweeting, Twitter is just an empty room. Social network sites are mediated networked publics that write community into being (boyd, 2006), where participants use environmental cues to construct an imagined audience and learn to perform different identities (Marwick & boyd, 2011), creating a sense of empowerment

through self-expression (Bechmann & Lomborg, 2013). For Jezebel to provide a social network apparatus was to give its commenters a sense of ownership in the site (Karahanna, Xu, & Zhang, 2015). In these early days of Jezebel, then, commenters took cues from both the editors and the architecture to develop a robust attachment to the site, with a sense of agency directed both vertically toward the content of the articles and horizontally toward content of the comment section.

2008: A split begins

Jezebel's second year would see a clear shift in editors' attitudes toward the comment section as the number of commenters grew and their discourse became more difficult to control. Holmes opened the year on January 2 with a site-wide resolution, headlined "This Year, Let's Call It Quits On The Nasty Nit-Picking" (Holmes, 2008b). The post, explicitly a response to a reader email asking for a "'no negative comments on a woman's appearance' rule," announced a moratorium on what Jezebel called bodysnarking. Holmes expressed some surprise at having needed to articulate the rule considering that the editors themselves refrained from remarking on celebrities' bodies even when shredding their fashion choices, but "maybe we need to be explicit," she said (Holmes, 2008b). It is important to note here that an entire paragraph of the reader's email is reproduced in Holmes' post, evidencing the power of reader pushback: women are bombarded by negative body messages from all directions every day, the reader wrote, but "think how fantastic it would be if Jezebel was the one media outlet that said 'No, that's not right'" (qtd. in Holmes, 2008b). By not simply instituting the suggestion in the email but publicly attributing it to the reader, Holmes here indicated that readers were collaborators in determining site values.

This did not, to be clear, include all readers. Eight months after Tkacik's faux-public-banning of seven commenters, Jezebel instituted a real banning of five. Significantly, however, the five commenters who were banned had been nominated by the community in response to a call that had gone out three days before. Reasons for banning included racism, bodysnarking, and unnecessary personal rudeness to another commenter, and another short list of commenters was publicly notified to cease their cool-kid, "queen bee" behavior lest they suffer the same fate. Overall, Stewart said, the rules were simple: "keep it thoughtful, play nice, and comment when you actually have something interesting to say" (Stewart, 2008b). Yet even if the editors presumably made the final call, the decision of who to remove was spurred by commenters' desires, again giving them input into the enforceable value set on the site.

In April, one month after the banning, the first official commenting guide appeared. Titled "The Girl's Guide to Commenting on Jezebel," it responded to what Holmes called a troubling change in the "nature and tone" of the comments. "There has been an increase in the stupidity, obnoxiousness, banality, and purposeful provocation in our comments," she wrote, "an increase that has (rightly) upset both our most loyal readers and new recruits" (Holmes, 2008a). In light of this trend, she said, editors would begin "a spring-long cleaning" of the comment section, banning anyone deemed to be "self-promotional, obnoxious, immature, insulting, nasty, and yes, boring" (Holmes, 2008a). As a set of standards, it was not a far cry from those posted the year before warning against "excessively self-promotional, obnoxious, or even worse, boring" contributions (Holmes, 2007a), but the inclusion of "immature," "insulting," and "nasty" points to the tonal shift she described above. After reminding commenters of the moratorium on bodysnarking, Holmes lays out for the first time the characteristic of good and comments.

Good comments, she says, are insightful and/or funny, and can provide "intelligent critique" and "calm, courteous, reasoned disagreement, either with the opinions/facts presented in a post itself of with other commenters" (Holmes, 2008a). The "opinions/facts" is key here, as it would seem to preclude discussions of, for instance, Tracie Egan Morrissey's penchant for using the word "retarded," to which many commenters objected. Furthermore, in addition to the list of bannable offenses laid out above, bad comments included personal attacks on commenters or editors, creating or contributing to an echo chamber, and whining or complaining as illustrated by the sentiment "I don't want to read about this, can't we see pictures of puppies?" (Holmes, 2008a). Taken together, these guidelines push back against the comment section's ability to critique the values demonstrated by the editorial staff. By characterizing questions of what Jezebel ought to cover as just whinging about a lack of puppies, Holmes asserts editorial dominance without having to justify it. While Gawker Media's emphasis on compelling original contributions is clear, punishing echo chambers seems somewhat disingenuous given the lack of any other way to demonstrate agreement—in the absence of an upvote/downvote system, the only way to put endorsement of a sentiment on the record was to literally post "I agree." These good comment/bad comment guidelines illustrate a sentiment that, although it would be recurrent in the commenting guidelines, would also be more and more undermined by the commenting architecture: "Jezebel is *not* a free for all, nor is it a democracy; for those who want to say whatever they want, whenever they want, we suggest you start your own blog" (Holmes, 2008a).

As Jezebel made its commenting guidelines more and more granular, Gawker sites also expanded their arsenal of disciplining tools. In August, Kotaku was the first to introduce a comment moderation technique called "disemvoweling," in which a comment that violated community guidelines would have all of its vowels removed by a moderator. Rather than being

deleted, such comments would be left in the thread as a grisly lesson to other commenters who might be tempted to flout the rules.

And yet as the commenting guidelines began working to divest commenters of their sense of ownership in the site, the architecture began to increase it. In early 2008, the earlier newsfeed-style functionality was discarded as the "+" sign that was clicked to follow someone was replaced by a heart symbol beside their name, which would appear empty on commenters whom you had not yet followed (or "hearted," as the parlance went) and filled in with red on commenters you had. This alteration in iconography and language changed the character of following someone to be less about curation and more about community-building. Although following someone no longer put their discourse alongside the editors', the bright red heart did make their comments easier to pick out and respond to in a long comment thread, encouraging more interaction among people who followed each other.

Commenters also began to use the act of hearting someone as a form of endorsement and affect. Because there was no notification system to alert people when they had been followed (although they could check their followers list on their profile page), it was common for commenters who felt particularly enthusiastic about a given comment to reply with "hearted!"—or, more ostentatiously, with "I am tempted to un-heart you just so I can heart you again!" or "I can't believe I haven't hearted you before now!" Private messaging having been added to the platform in November 2007, these statements were a deliberate public performance of solidarity and support. With no upvote/downvote system—and with "echo chambers" discouraged—commenters used the hearting system to create a visual record of kinship and community values, a record that could become especially important in response to comments that disagreed with editorial staff.

In addition to their networking function, hearts also introduced a crucial new element to the Jezebel comments. Any commenter who had 25 or more followers (later raised to 40) was awarded a little yellow star beside their username to announce their influential status, creating hierarchy within the commenting system. These marks of prestige ostensibly rewarded quality contributions, but at the same time it also gamified interactions with other users, placing emphasis on quantity rather than quality of connections. Comments could also now be organized not just according to chronology by oldest or newest, but also by "most popular" (as measured by replies), marking the beginning of a years-long push to reward comments that created the most conversation.

In 2008, then, we begin to see a bifurcation between the role for commenters that is described and enforced by the editors and that which is promoted by the architecture. Anna Holmes may be saying that Jezebel is not a free-for all, but that message is undermined by the presence of a social media apparatus that seemingly democratizes the space.

2009: Fraying and fracture

For Jezebel, 2009 begins bluntly: "Commenters, We Have a Problem," the headline from January 21 reads, the illustration below it a cartoon of an angry woman standing on a sign that says "FUCK!" (Holmes, 2009a). The problem, Holmes said, was "threadjacking," the name given to the apparently increasing phenomenon of a commenter shifting the focus of the comments away from the topic at hand and toward whatever he or she wanted to discuss instead. In contrast to the emphasis in the "Girl's Guide" on combating "stupidity, obnoxiousness, banality, and purposeful provocation" (Holmes, 2008a), in this post Holmes attempts to correct a crescendo in personal oversharing, framing her admonition for the commenters' own good.

Commenters, she wrote, are only a "*tiny* (albeit vocal) percentage" of the Jezebel readership, and "we (and you) have no idea who is reading the site on any given day"; Jezebel, she emphasized, is not a "safe space" (Holmes, 2009a). This expression of concern is somewhat undercut by obvious exasperation: "Some of y'all need to *stop*," she wrote. "This blog is not a messageboard" (2009a). This frustration, I contend, arises in direct response to the hearting architecture, which did indeed give commenters the experience of a messageboard. For commenters to use the comment section as a space to talk amongst themselves, Holmes said, was disrespectful because "it directs attention away from posts and renders much or all of an editor's work moot by shifting the conversation completely" (2009a). This tension between the commenters' and the editors' feelings of investment and ownership can also be seen in what Holmes described as "repeated calls for 'open threads so we can talk about what we want to talk about'"—to which, she said, "[t]he short answer is 'no'" (2009a). Violations, she concluded, would be aggressively punished with dismevoweling or deletion.

The editors' growing frustration with the comment section's independent agenda manifested in an April Fool's joke that was barely a joke at all. The comment section had also been a part of the previous year's April Fool's prank; the infamous "Jezebel has been bought by Conde Nast and is now a typical ladymag" announcement was supplemented with new stereotypically gendered, consumerist commenting guidelines. In 2009, however, the prank took on an edge.

After deep thought, Holmes said, she had decided to disable the comments on Jezebel. "Other blogs have disabled their commenting functions with little fanfare but much success," she wrote, "freeing writers to think out loud and speak their minds without having to worry about personal, nasty, and/or other ad hominem attacks and negative energy from anonymous readers

and trolls" (Holmes, 2009b). Positing that the readership might be better off without "the anarchic yet insular echo chamber often on display in the comments," the post (complete with logistical information about account retention) reads as remarkably plausible, more like some dark thoughts dashed off after a few shots of whiskey than a ha-ha joke. (The comment section, of course, was closed.) Four hours later, Dodai Stewart posted to let everyone know that it had been a joke (Stewart, 2009a).

But was it? After announcing that comments were not, in fact, being taken away, Stewart spent most of a paragraph reiterating Jezebel's commenting guidelines. She then reproduced and commented on a sampling of the no-doubt voluminous email editors had received—some happy, some sad, some angry—including the one serving as epigraph for this chapter. Stewart's framing of two emails in particular is notable. The following email (reproduced here in full), for instance, was described as "just nasty":

> I was disgusted that the editorial staff would remove the commenting option so suddenly and without debate. I find it very disturbing that the comments have been disallowed because of the editor's dislike over the lack of control over goings on. I feel as though when you invest in a site such as this, you do expect some kind of accountability on behalf of those who control it. (qtd. in Stewart, 2009a)

Although the email is strongly worded, it is unclear what about it could be considered "nasty," an ambiguity that also potentially undermines the Girl's Guide's lamentations about the "nasty" turn of the comments. A commenter's similar expression of desire for agency and accountability is later characterized as coming from "[s]omeone with a sense of entitlement." That email argued that getting rid of comments was a disservice to the site and the readers because the comments allowed readers to learn from each other and to "put the editors/writers/contributors in check every now and then." To apply Holmes' personal epiphany about her experience with comments to the site at large was not "appropriate" for "the thousands of people that enjoy commenting on

Jezebel" (Stewart, 2009a). The email concluded: "And now what do you expect us to do? Just sit back and take your word as law?" "Well, yes, actually," Stewart responded. "Because we work here?"

Unlike the previous year's April Fool's joke, the humor of which hinged on perverting what commenters perceived as the values of the comment section space, the 2009 prank functioned to put commenters in their place. Stewart's follow-up post cast the "prank" as less playful and more threatening, like a parent pretending to throw away a favorite toy to get their child's attention. "Commenting on this site, as we have said before, is a privilege and not a right," Stewart wrote. "So please. Behave yourselves" (Stewart, 2009a). Her responses to the emails reiterated the point: editorial voices would always be the true voices of Jezebel, and for commenters to expect a voice was unwarranted and entitled. The idea of the comment section as a necessary space for accountability was dismissed out of hand.

The first major architectural change of 2009 would directly address editorial frustrations with threadjacking (but contradict Holmes's response) by providing first open threads and ultimately a whole user forum. Although it would later add light weekend coverage, for years Jezebel only published Monday through Friday, and commenters who were not done chatting with each other would simply keep going in the comment sections of the last few Friday articles. In July 2009, to keep the archive of the comment sections on topic and prevent threadjacking, Jezebel introduced open threads as the last post on Fridays, and after that, another open thread called Saturday Night Social. Finally, in October, Jezebel (alongside all Gawker sites) introduced a backroom reader forum called Groupthink, where commenters could post about whatever they desired without violating the regularly reiterated mandate to keep comment threads on topic for each post.

It is unclear who came up with the name—Denton, Holmes, or a mysterious cabal—but when set beside the on-theme names of the forums for Gawker Media's science fiction blog, io9 (Observation Deck); life skills blog, Lifehacker (Hacker Space); and tech blog, Gizmodo (White Noise), the implications are pejorative and gendered. Nevertheless, over the years (as of this writing, it is still in operation), Groupthink would grow to become a popular space for Jezebel expatriates. Some commenters maintained that they rarely visited the Jezebel mainpage anymore, although there was also a significant amount of metadiscussion and outright complaining about the main site's commenters and writers.[11]

And indeed, reading between the lines, this grumbling was part of the point. In addition to giving commenters a place to have personal and off-topic discussions, Groupthink helped move meta-criticism of Jezebel's choices out of sight. Introducing the forum (which had been in operation but not yet publicized), Holmes wrote that Groupthink was for off-topic content, which she defined both as content totally unrelated to the topic at hand and as "comments that denigrate, disrespect, or dismiss the post topic by shifting focus elsewhere" (Holmes, 2009d). This definition certainly covers comments that derail or re-center the conversation, but it also covers debates about Jezebel's values and scope. With a new space that was linked to but also separate from the main Jezebel site, editors could now curate the content in the comment sections more strictly.

At the same time, another major change in the site architecture shifted some of the responsibility for curation onto the commenters themselves. On July 9, Jezebel added what would come to be the defining characteristic of Gawker Media comments: tiered commenting. Whereas before, commenters would receive stars for hitting specific follower benchmarks, now

[11] Because the Groupthink archives were completely wiped with the transition to Kinja in 2013, examples are unavailable.

stars were awarded only by editors or moderators, for either a single excellent comment or a history of quality contributions. And while before, stars were intrinsically valuable as badges of honor, now they came with tangible benefits in the hierarchy of the site. Starred commenters would appear, as usual, in black text immediately underneath the article text. Unstarred commenters, on the other hand, would appear in gray and did not appear by default; to see them, commenters would have to click a button marked "show all." Although eventually commenters would be able to go into their profile settings and make "show all" their default, this did not take effect until February 2010, and readers without accounts would have to click through every time—assuming they remembered to do so. The change created widespread consternation among commenters, who felt that the tiered system went against the presumed egalitarian values of the comment section. But it also created a sense of heightened stakes as commenters stepped up their collective game to try to win their star.

With stars came both power and responsibility, and Holmes' announcement of the change explicitly positioned starred commenters as "mini-moderators." While starred commenters could not award stars to those in "the grays," they could promote individual comments "into the black," where they would be more likely to be seen. Starred commenters also had the unprecedented ability to view pink unapproved comments and approve commenters. Because simply replying to a pink comment was enough to approve its author to post on Jezebel indefinitely, Holmes warned that power should be wielded with discrimination. In fact, all new powers were to be approached with a healthy dose of caution—starred commenters who promoted or approved subpar comments, or who spent all of their energy promoting others' comments rather than making their own, could lose their stars (Holmes, 2009c).

This is a key point: while the new tiered system seemed to be creating opportunities for commenters to "win," it also created new ways for them to lose. Comments or commenters who provoked the ire of an editor could be (and were) temporarily or permanently demoted to the grays, turning a supposed opportunity into a cudgel to enforce proper participation. At the same time, the "mini-moderator" responsibilities constructed a sense of the comment section as something individual commenters had the power, even the responsibility, to curate. It continued the trend of ownership begun by the hearting apparatus, especially when star status was awarded as evidence of worth and belonging (many unstarred commenters expressed that commenting now felt futile).

Further blurring the distinction between editors and commenters was the addition of a box on the front page labeled "let your fingers do the talking." Here, commenters could post to #groupthink, but they could also alert the #trollpatrol of an offensive comment or, crucially, inform the editors of #tips. In an interview with Nieman Lab, Denton argued that giving commenters space on the main page of the site was a necessary way to "blur the line between our editors and commenter-contributors" (qtd. in Seward, 2009). "[A]s the front pages of our sites become ever more professional," he said, "it's even more important to allow anarchy to bubble up from below" (qtd. in Seward, 2009). Here, Denton openly conscripts the commenters into providing labor for Gawker Media sites, marking the pervious boundary between editors and commenters as part of a deliberate strategy.

Perhaps as pushback against the "anarchy" and porous boundaries, in December 2009, Holmes published another commenting guide. Where the "Girl's Guide" quickly dispensed with the housekeeping of new commenting features and moved on to clarifying desired commenting content, "The Craft: Commenting On, Contributing To Jezebel" frames most of its commenting

discussion through the lens of the architecture. Want to be off-topic? Take it to #groupthink. Have ideas about what the site should cover? Take it to #tips. Notably, the language Holmes used to present the #tips function was so corporate as to read as resistant: "Many readers have already discovered how to make their voices really stand out via our #tips page. […] At #tips, quality contributors have the spotlight" (Holmes, 2009e). This sense of corporate branding was also apparent in the first paragraph of the post, where Holmes opines that "[t]he commenters on Gawker Media's stable of properties are known for their smarts, savvy, wit, breadth of knowledge, and curiosity, but great online communities always need a set of rules and regulations to keep the discourse high and humming along" (Holmes, 2009e). Certainly, this line performs the important function of both demonstrating that she values the commenting community and arguing for the need for structure and guidelines, but the choice to frame this in terms of Gawker Media rather than Jezebel, the framing of Jezebel as merely one horse in a "stable" of properties, and the slightly over-the-top generic praise hint, again, at resistance. It is important to note, too, that just six months after writing this guide, Holmes would step down as editor-in-chief out of disagreement with the commercial direction in which Denton was pushing the blog.

Holmes ended "The Craft" with a new sort of reminder: "There are real people involved here, both on the front-end writers/editors) and the back (commenters); ignore or disrespect this fact at your peril" (Holmes, 2009e). Although this point had been made previously in a note from comment moderator Hortense Smith (Stewart, 2008a), this was the first time it had framed this way by an editor. (As discussed in detail in Chapter Three, 2009 is also the year Dodai Stewart wrote the first of two Jezebel posts attempting to instruct commenters on how to approach posts about race; Stewart's post had gone up three days before.) Taken together with the tone of the

rest of the post, it can be read as an admonition both to commenters who needed to remember basic courtesy and to a company that needed to remember that a community was more than metrics. Even the title, "Commenting On, Contributing To Jezebel" points simultaneously to the ways that commenters write community into being and to the act of contributing their labor to someone else's endeavor. Changes to the architecture, Holmes seems to warn, should not be interpreted as increases in agency but as evidence of commoditization.

2010–2012: Regime change

As Denton and the Gawker Media brass continued developing Kinja behind the scenes, 2010 and 2011 saw relatively little change to the commenting architecture. In February 2010, "see all comments" and "expand all reply threads" became available as permanent settings for those with commenting accounts, and in 2011, the hearting system returned after being taken away at some point after the debut of the tiered comments in 2009.

Guidelines, however, accelerated. Anna Holmes wrote two different commenting guides in the first half of 2010, one of which followed Stewart in attempting to teach commenters how to comment respectfully on matters of race. The other, "Refresher Courses: Rules & Guidelines For Commenting," was the most detailed guide yet. The title itself is notable in two respects; first that it frames itself as a reiteration of rules—this process had begun to feel repetitive—and second that it is the first set of guidelines to specifically title itself as "rules." Where the first line of "The Craft" spoke of "a crash course in commenting etiquette" (Holmes, 2009e), the first line of "Refresher Courses" called itself "a reminder and a rundown of the commenting policy on Jezebel" (Holmes, 2010c). The next sentence was, again, the boilerplate about Gawker Media's "stable of properties," though this time it was warmed up with a more personal statement: "We

love our readers and our commenters—the latter are some of the smartest, savviest and funniest in the business, and I for one, am routinely rendered speechless by the care, thought, intelligence and insight you provide every single day" (Holmes, 2010c). What follows is a lengthy guide with twelve different bolded headings, admonishing commenters to assume good faith on the part of editors and other commenters and warning at length about personal attacks, especially those growing from longstanding resentments: "If you have a problem with a fellow commenter or one of the writers/editors, you can private message ("PM") the individual(s) or take it outside the blog entirely via email or some other method" (2010c). This, like the instructions about taking off-topic discussion to Groupthink, would functionally keep certain kinds of disagreement out of the mainpage and off the record.

Holmes also articulated a key formulation of the editors' view of the purpose of the comment section: "Think of the site as an energetic, vibrant dinner party with lots of different dishes and drinks—you may not like what we're serving, but as an invited guest, we expect you to be civil to us and the other participants while you're here—or we'll ask you to leave"(2010c) (2010). This metaphor is not new to Gawker Media and its comment sections. Back in 2005, Gina Trapani, the editor of Gawker Media's efficiency blog, Lifehacker, opened her commenting guide by saying that "[l]eaving a comment on someone's weblog is like walking into their living room and joining in on a conversation" (Trapani, 2005). Commenters are invited guests in a space that belongs to someone else, and participation in the dinner party conversation is a privilege that can be easily revoked. Once terms of decorum are clear, commenters can either deferentially comply or they can leave the party altogether—it belongs to the host. As a metaphor, the dinner party creates a particular set of relations. It gives comments a purpose (enlightenment and entertainment), an audience (other guests and the host), and a relationship to

the host site (deferential), relations reinforced here as Holmes concluded by pointing to the fact that the comment section was closed because "the rules outlined above are not up for discussion or debate." In lieu of comments, at the end of the post Holmes provided links to ten different posts about how to use the comment section.

These exact commenting guidelines would be posted again in April under the title "Know Comment: Rules For Readers," with the note that "recent dustups" had motivated her to republish them. The rules would now, she said, appear once a week "for those who are new or need refreshers" (Holmes, 2010b). Although this commenting guide was not, in fact, reposted every week (or ever again, for that matter), editorial frustration is palpable; 2010 was so infamously filled with commenter-editor conflict that not only did it inspire this dissertation, but it also led Persephone Magazine, a blog run by Jezebel expatriates, to publish a two-part list of the "Top 10 Jezebel Shitstorms of 2010."

On June 30, 2010, Holmes stepped down as editor-in-chief, passing the baton to Jessica Coen in what would mark the beginning of a distinct new era. Coen, who Holmes would later describe as having a "broader, more commercial sensibility" than Holmes herself (Doll, 2013), had little of Holmes's interest in attempting to guideline the comment section into shape. In the single commenting guide she published in her four-year tenure, (in August 2010, matter-of-factly titled "Commenting On Jezebel: Rules of the Road") she did not mince words. "Commenting is a privilege, not a right," she began. "The following guidelines are very loose and open to our interpretation, but they should shed some light on the general perspective of the site's editors and moderators. This is probably obvious but bears repeating: **This is our website, and we will moderate it as we see fit**" (Coen, 2010a, bold in original). Right out of the gate, Coen was not just letting commenters know that they could shape up or ship out, but also destabilizing the

guidelines even as she labeled them rules. The "loose guidelines" were only open to "our" interpretation—commenters would need to make sure they stayed far on the correct side of where they guessed the line might be. Other than a brief list of four kinds of "comments we love," nearly all of the commenting guide was devoted to detailing the transgressions that might get someone destarred, demoted, or banned: missing the point, promoting too many comments without leaving enough of your own, arguing with editors about censorship and free speech, consistent arguing and complaining, rudeness, piling on, personal attacks, and "ill-tempered sass or bullying."

As a guide, it was composed to strip commenters of the illusion that they had control over the discourse of Jezebel as a site, or even of the commenting community itself. In addition to dismissing concerns about scare-quoted "censorship" or "free speech" as "just silly," she warned that even bringing them up would "almost certainly have some kind of consequence" (Coen, 2010a). "From here on out," she said, marking a clean break with past habitus, "we expect everyone to remain calm when editors and moderators step in. Crusades and campaigns will probably have the opposite effect of what you want." When shitstorms would break out, she said, commenters should "think twice before you throw yourself into that thread," as editors would have "little or no tolerance" for participation (Coen, 2010a). To truly have their concerns heard by the editors, readers should not post a comment but should email instead; Coen framed this position as a practical concern—editors were too busy writing and editing to read every single comment—but as when Holmes made the same request, sending all complaints through email would ensure a critique-free comment archive.

She followed up this airing of grievances with a call for community involvement: "And you can help, too. It is a community, after all, and we want your involvement." The specific

types of endorsed involvement: nominating comments of the day, pointing out trolls, and sending tips, all using the front-page box that Denton had introduced the year before. She concluded with some half-hearted community rhetoric: “We appreciate everyone’s participation in our community, and look forward to the continual passing of the peace pipe. Kumbaya, and happy commenting” (Coen, 2010a). As with Holmes’s most recent contributions, the comment section remained closed.

The tight reins Coen describes here are deeply at odds with the commenting architecture. The emphasis on negative consequences turns the tiered commenting system into a stick rather than a carrot, with commenters under constant risk of losing their star for violating “loose” guidelines contingent on the editors’ moods.

Writing in 2019, Coen’s pushback against “freedom of speech” concerns hardly seems unusual. Twitter’s 2016 banning of conservative provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos raised some hackles but also, for many, highlighted that freedom of speech means freedom from persecution by the government, not freedom to say whatever you want wherever you want. Privately run sites like Twitter and Facebook are under no obligation to offer anyone a platform, and removing someone does not violate their rights. From this perspective, Coen’s statements seem reasonable and in keeping with norms: a women’s site, for instance, is under no obligation to tolerate offensive speech in the name of avoiding censorship.

Offensive speech, however, is not the speech to which Coen refers—recall that at this time the audition system was still in place to keep offensive and anti-woman content from appearing on the site in the first place. Instead, this firm rejection of rights—as well as the warnings against (poorly defined) personal attacks or even joining critical discussions—is directed at the very group of people the architecture has spent three years training as a robust

networked public, the people who, as discussed in Chapter Two, want to build a better Jezebel. In this light, the appropriative use of "peace pipe" and "kumbaya" in the final sign-off with no option to comment can be read as a deliberate flexing of muscles, a signal that there is a new sheriff in town and there's nothing the comment section can do about it.

As mentioned, this would be Coen's only commenting guide. Although she would semi-regularly join the comment section of other editors' posts, with a few exceptions she made no metatextual acknowledgement of commenters' concerns about the site. But she didn't dismiss commenters entirely. Posts based on commenter content—Pissing Contest, Reader Roundup, Comment of the Day—continued their regular publication schedule.

All throughout 2010, commenters upset with the direction of Jezebel took their complaints elsewhere. Some landed in Groupthink, which was perceived as a safe space[12] for venting despite occasional evidence that it was monitored by the editors and which came to develop its own community. Some, as previously mentioned, left Jezebel altogether and founded a competing women's publication, Persephone Magazine, which is still at least occasionally in operation today. And some took to Tumblr to create blogs like the now-defunct Fuck No, Jezebel and STFU[13] Jezzies, which mocked Jezebel posts and comments that performed feminism improperly, too much, or not enough. Although enforcement of the commenting guidelines would largely keep complaints and metadiscussion off the mainpage, ultimately these practices served to push critical discourse off of Jezebel and into spaces less visible to Jezebel's readership but also less subject to Jezebel's editorial control.

On June 26, 2012, Coen announced that the comments had been temporarily turned off in preparation for the next day's launch of Kinja. This announcement contained very little

[12] As indicated in my introduction, in reality Groupthink was as publicly accessible as any other space on the Web.
[13] STFU = shut the fuck up

information about Kinja but a great deal of information about her attitude toward the current comment section, which she described as too-often having been dominated by a "cliquish echo chamber" (Coen, 2012a). In the absence of an actual comment section, Coen included a light call-and-response structure in her post:

> We've turned off comments. *But I only read this site for the comments!* Oh. Maybe we should just stop writing then. HA. C'mon. You can't get rid of us. […]
>
> I know, I know: You've seen the new commenting system and you hate it! Or you've not even seen it and you still hate it! Yeah, I know your type. […]
>
> *But I only read this site for the comments!* Yeah, I've heard. (Coen, 2012a)

In these back-and-forths, Coen constructs a collective commenter who is whiny, obstreperous, and ungrateful. But under the new comment system, everything would be better, she said: "If you could see me now, you'd see a bright and shiny future sparkling in my bloodshot eyes. And my pupils are super dilated with hope" (Coen, 2012). In Coen's harsh, defensive characterization of the Jezebel commenters, we see echoes of Lipton's 2008 article for the *New York Times*—the one Anna Holmes criticized as being too harsh. After five years or ever-increasing conflict, the split between commenter and editor conceptions of the comment section was now so wide as to be overtly antagonistic, and the site stood poised on the brink of architectural renovations that could change everything from the ground up.

2012–2013: Kinja

On June 27, 2012, Kinja went live on Jezebel. In her post introducing the new system (and announcing that comments had been turned back on), Coen laid out the following major changes: (1) the starring system was gone, as was the hashtag affordance; (2) commenters could now opt to dismiss replies to their own comments, sending the dismissed reply to the bottom of the

comment section as its own orphan comment; and (3) commenters were now able to create "burner" accounts without registering through the site. In anticipation of the objection that if it ain't broke, you don't fix it, Coen insisted that, actually, "[t]he system *was* broken."

> We created it, and we got it wrong. Stars inevitably created a hierarchy; suspending/banning/moving threads just created drama. And most frustrating of all, the best conversations got lost in the fray. It became loud and messy at times; no matter how insightful the comment, it was all cheap seats. (Coen, 2012b)

The messaging here is mixed: was the problem that there was a hierarchy, or that "it was all cheap seats"? Elaborating slightly, Coen described the new system as a "meritocracy," writing that "Kinja is about letting the best discussions rise to the top. These conversations, the ones that are just as great to read as the post itself, will no longer be hard to find. Because the better a thread is, the higher up it will appear in the comments" (2012b).

Two assumptions here muddy the waters. First, the star system itself had been introduced as a meritocracy—if it was no longer functioning as one, that was arguably more reflective of the judgment of the star-bestowers than of problems with the architecture itself. Second, labeling a system in which the most-interacted-with comments rise to the top as a "meritocracy" assumes that interaction is a sign of quality; as discussed in the next chapter, it is not. Additionally, "sort by popularity" was already an option for viewing the comments. The presentation of these minor changes as revolutionary speak more to a desire to reframe the purpose of the comment section than to actually change its function, an attempt to accomplish architecturally what a dozen commenting guidelines had been unable to do.

Although Coen led with the dissolution of stars, the true lede, the change that would transform the experience comment section, appeared in points (2) and (3). Giving commenters the ability to moderate comments on their own posts, while certainly a further point in favor of commenter ownership, would have little practical effect were it not for what goes unsaid in point

(3): the addition of anonymous, registration-free burner accounts meant that the audition-based gatekeeping system was no longer in place. That is, in the same moment that Kinja handed commenters the reins to the comment section, it also set loose a pack of barking dogs; it created deputies with one hand and let robbers in with the other.

In April 2013, the system was updated to what commenters would call "Kinja 2.0." Here, too, there were three major changes. First, every registered username on Gawker Media now had its own blog (username.kinja.com) that looked and functioned identically to the main pages of the flagship sites; material written for these blogs had the potential to be selected for the Jezebel mainpage. Second, although the hearting nomenclature remained in the dustbin, commenters were now able to follow each other again. Finally, Groupthink was now its own Kinja blog run by some handpicked commenters. As with Kinja 1.0, the significance of most of these changes was spun. In presenting the Kinja blogs, for instance, Coen acknowledged that some commenters might be bothered by the idea of the mainpage using their intellectual property: "You may have some proprietary concerns about this, which is justifiable—but don't worry. You will always get the byline, linkage, and credit" (Coen, 2013c). Coen next poses a hypothetical reader question: "Are you encouraging us to start blogging on our own Kinja sites so you sell more ads and slide around on piles of gold coins like Scrooge McDuck?" She answers, "Actually, no — there will be no advertising on your Kinja blogs. We won't profit off of your work" (2013c). Between these two assertions—commenters will receive credit for their work and Gawker Media will not profit off of ads on their blogs—is a very specific gap, somewhat clumsily sidestepped: Gawker Media might not be putting ads on the Kinja blogs, but it was certainly making money off of any posts it promoted to the Jezebel mainpage—saying that they would not profit from commenter labor, as Coen did here, was patently false. During the rollout of Kinja 1.0, Denton had bragged to the

Columbia Journalism Review that the goal of Kinja was "to erase the traditional distinctions between writers, editors, readers, subject, and sources" (Sterne, 2012); this change would continue that process as commenters were now responsible both for moderating the comment section and producing mainpage content, all without compensation.

Although it went unmentioned in Coen's post, the re-introduction of following revealed the previous emphasis on meritocracy to be a lie. Although stars themselves were still absent, commenters who were followed by Jezebel would appear in black, while others would not only appear in gray but also be hidden behind a separate tab at the top of the comment section; to see these "pending" comments, readers would have to click the tab, then click another button to say that yes, they did indeed want to see comments that had not yet been approved by Jezebel. In other words, the tiered system was not only still in existence but had created an even larger gap between the chosen and the not-.

The change to Groupthink would not affect the mainpage at all. All pre-existing Groupthink content, however, had been deleted; the reset button had been hit, and that included the participants. What Coen framed as "Several active commenters already have access to post there" (2013c) actually meant that despite having been previously open to all, Groupthink was now an exclusive club. Although the commenter-administrators would take applications in waves and a year later hundreds of people would have commenting privileges, in the early days of Kinja 2.0, Groupthink was populated only by longstanding members of the commentariat.

Conclusion

The slow degradation of the relationship between commenters and editors was accelerated by architectural affordances designed to create feelings of site ownership in the commentariat. The

more control and interactivity the commenters were given, the more evidence piled up indicating that their opinions and participation mattered. The increasing number of comment guides illustrates the power of the architecture of commitment is, demonstrating how much the affordances of a given system matter both to the commenter experience and, as we shall see in future chapters, to the meaning-making process. Commenters leveraged all aspects of the architecture, not just in developing community but in declaring their ownership over the content as well.

Editors, then, felt the need to reassert their own control, and Jessica Coen in particular engaged in the process of making sure commenters knew that architectural agency was not the same as discursive agency, and that editors had power over both. Coen had little interest in negotiation, opting instead to use the affordances of enforcement—and indeed, as the commenting architecture developed more and more rewards, removing those rewards became an easier and easier punishment to inflict. The possibility of a star functioned both as a carrot and as a stick as commenters who did not have them tried to earn them and commenters who did have them tried not to lose them. Kinja, despite its shiny new packaging, would function no differently, continuing to exert control over commenters while exploiting them via the illusion of agency.

That Jezebel could have a dozen commenting guides while sites like Gawker and io9 had one is astonishing. In part, this is a reflection of Anna Holmes's personal commitment to a particular vision for the comment section; in this respect, each guide is an act of faith, a gesture of hope toward a smoother future just one perfect articulation of principles away. The proliferation of comment guides were also certainly partially a result of growing pains—while early articles would draw dozens of comments, by 2010 Jezebel had twice the comment activity

of all the other Gawker Media sites combined (Holmes, 2010a), and particularly popular or controversial posts might crack four figures. While certainly people are passionate about sports, science fiction, and gaming, and while there are certainly ideologies involved in all of these pursuits, feminism is both a deeply personal set of values and a high-stakes public performance. It makes sense, then, that commenters would feel exceptionally invested in regulating how that feminism is performed. In the next chapter, I take up how commenters leveraged the architectural affordances of the comment section to mount a resistance on the bottom of the page.

Chapter Three:

Enacting the Record: Building a Better Jezebel

In the course of an October 2009 about reality television series *Toddlers and Tiaras*, Jezebel editor Tracie Egan Morrissey posted a screengrab of a black teenage contestant staring into the middle distance with a focused look on her face, the chyron "crowning" appearing below her on the screen. "Speaking of turds," Morrissey wrote, referring to an earlier screengrab, "that's all I can think about when looking at this screen grab and caption" (Morrissey, 2009). Jezebel commenter MizJenkins, whose avatar was a black woman and who often posted to educate Jezebel commenters about issues of race, pointed out that the joke reinforced longstanding racist discourses linking black skin to feces. After some brief back-and-forth in which Morrissey scoffed at the very idea that her post could have been offensive, MizJenkins was banned. In a post for Persephone Magazine,[14] MizJenkins (2011) explains that she waited a few months, then apologized to the editors and was reinstated as a commenter—only to be banned for good in July 2010 for criticizing Morrissey's take on Carol Channing's black heritage.

In the wake of these bannings, a small resistance arose: dozens of commenters changed their usernames to reflect their anger on behalf of MizJenkins—"X loves MizJenkins," "Y supports MizJ," "Z says bring MizJenkins back NOW." Because many of these commenters were regular participants, the comment sections on most articles were sprinkled with these statements of support, which often led newer commenters to ask what the campaign meant, which led, of course, to the story being retold and refreshed in the collective memory. While these demonstrations did not result in any change from the top down—MizJenkins remained

[14] Founded and run by disaffected Jezebel commenters.

banned—by leveraging the affordances of the commenting architecture, commenters were able to create a counter-narrative in the record that nonetheless undermined the editors' actions.

In "Archiving Feminist Grassroots Media," Brigitte Geiger and Margit Hauser (2012) point to the key role of feminist archives in passing on women's history in general and feminist media in particular, which carry meaning both as a means of internal communication and as "a means to self-determined expression to the 'outside'" (p. 74). While Geiger and Hauser are speaking of material archives, there is resonance with the work being done in the Jezebel comment section. In her discussion of digital networked publics, danah boyd (2010) lays out four affordances of digitality, elements unique to building with bytes rather than bits: replicability, searchability, scalability, and, crucially to this discussion, persistence. While very few forms of analog communication inherently create a trace, digital communication is largely the inverse. And while there are certainly forms of digital communication that do not leave an easily accessible trace (Snapchat, perhaps, or unarchived Skype sessions), the majority of online communication leaves behind a textual record that can be accessed by readers hours, weeks, or years after the conversation took place—even if those traces are more unstable than we typically acknowledge.

Boyd points to Benjamin's (1969) claim that "what is captured by photography has a different essence than the experienced moment," adding that "both writing and photography provide persistence, but they also transform the acts they are capturing" (p. 46). I suggest a pivot away from looking at Web writing as something that "captures" some sort of outside essence; while there is certainly a dense network of intention and individual material context behind each comment on Jezebel that has been frozen, photograph-like, into one particular textual articulation, that articulation is itself an unmediated object to be received and interacted with by

others. The textual record of a comment section is not simply a curated archive of the best, most interesting, most representative; it is—with some exceptions—an archive of the interactions as they occurred, the practical equivalent of overhearing a conversation. In a space like a comment section, photograph and moment are inextricably entangled, and interactions are archived even as they are enacted. The existence of this record raises the stakes on public interactions, each utterance not simply personal expression but a contribution to an individual and collective record. Conversations in the Jezebel comment section, then, simultaneously negotiate and instantiate feminism.

In this chapter, I show how the Jezebel commenters self-consciously engage in this process, leveraging their own on-the-record-ness to intervene in Jezebel's feminist performance. By implicating the editors directly, invoking the comment section as its own public, and deploying—even "hacking"—the affordances of the architecture, commenters manipulate the record to better reflect the kind of feminism to which they subscribe. I look mainly at three controversies, increasing in complexity. First, I look at commenter responses to an arguably tasteless joke about Twilight, highlighting the dissonance between how the purpose of the comment section is perceived by the commenters and how it is perceived by the editors. Then, I examine the rhetorical moves made by one commenter in particular in response to a post offering a $10,000 bounty for un-photoshopped versions of Lena Dunham's Vogue shoot. Finally, I trace an ongoing comment section resistance campaign to its spectacular end, highlighting the crucial role of the comment section in disrupting Jezebel's narratives about itself, particularly regarding race.

Enacting clashing agendas

In July 2010, Jezebel editor Margaret Hartmann published an article headlined "23-year-old dies while watching Twilight: Eclipse," (2010) the full text of which reads: "In New Zealand, a 23-year-old transient was found after a screening of *Twilight: Eclipse*. He had no obvious injuries, so police still can't rule out Lautner's abs as the cause of death (sorry, couldn't resist)."

It did not go over well. Of 163 comments, 67 directly criticized Jezebel for using a homeless man's death as an opportunity for a punchline, some of them at length—one even suggested Jezebel post a retraction (characteristically, they did not). Thirty-eight comments either joined in with jokes of their own or expressed support of the original post, although 27 of those were from the same three people. As commenters argued back and forth about whether the joke had been appropriate, the comment section also became the site of debate about how the space could be used to respond.

Erin Gloria Ryan, then known as MorningGloria, was one of a handful of commenters selected by the editors to be a moderator and enforce the commenting guidelines. Noting the tenor of the comment section, she posted the following comment urging people to take their complaints to email:

> **MorningGloria (2010a):** OK, folks. Before adding to the pile-on, please consider whether or not your comment contributes anything to the discussion that hasn't already been said. **Editorial suggestions, as always, should be emailed to the editors, not parsed out in the comments.**

It is important to note a few things here. The first is that at this stage, the Jezebel commenting architecture lacked any sort of upvote or "like" system that would allow other commenters to register their agreement without posting a comment of their own. In order to show that a particular point of view was widely held, then, commenters were essentially required to post their own comments, even if just "AMEN," and "SAME." Although many commenting guides

warned against creating an echo chamber, commenters were constrained by the architecture—to put their agreement on the record, they would have to violate the rules.

Commenters also resisted the idea that direct criticism of the host site must be conducted via email, off the record. As discussed in Chapter Two, Jezebel editors framed the site as a dinner party at which the commenters were invited guests—under this framework, it might be sensible to keep large-scale critiques private. Radical feminist textuality, however, is not a dinner party, and commenters working to put their objections on the record found the lack of public accountability upsetting and insulting.

> **MmeSosostris (2010b):** @morninggloria Thanks for the bold, babe. Or should I say, my dicey reading comp skills thank you! Really made it easier to get what you meant. Or no, perhaps I should say, I will post what I like and if that means commenting to saying "wtf" about a post that is sickening, I will do that. And then I will email the editors! Enjoy your star, little pet commenter.

In this first reply to her comment, MorningGloria is accused of being the editors' stooge, emphasizing the perceived rift between the agendas of the comment section and the administration. MmeSosostris refuses to be positioned as a dinner guest obliged to polite behavior and asserts her right to use the space as she sees fit, including for direct critique of the post. MorningGloria replies:

> **MorningGloria (2010b):** @mmesosostris Whoa, hold on there. Little? How do you know that I'm not seven and a half feet tall? (The comment was made because I was asked to help moderate comments and make sure that people are following —[link to the "Girl's Guide"]. It might serve you well to review the guidelines from time to time. Personal attacks: unnecessary!)

It should be noted that the particular comment guide linked in MorningGloria's second comment does not actually say anything about editorial suggestions needing to be emailed, although several similar commenting guides (there were at least eight in operation at the time) do make such a request. Nevertheless, MmeSosostris immediately backs down, writing, "I believe I see a

diploma arriving in the mail because I just got schooled :(" (2010a). But not everyone was so easily swayed. Replying to MmeSosostris' original indignant comment, Agumen writes:

> **Agumen (2010):** @mmesosostris Yeah, I agree. I'm not going to speak my mind.. because there are... guidelines!!! Fuck that. A lame way for editors to avoid having their shit called, and for people to be able to discuss when an editor fucks up.

Here, Agumen expresses a sentiment seen in at least one other comment: that editors are trying to avoid accountability for what they write. Once again, MorningGloria replies with a link to a comment guide, this one expressly discouraging public confrontation[15]:

> **MorningGloria (2010c):** @Agumen Dude. Read the commenting guidelines; they're right here. [link to "Know Comment"]
> I didn't say that people should stop remarking about the fact that they're upset that the only place for a human being to find shelter while he died was a movie theater playing the latest installment of one of the eye-rollingest book series of all time. I merely suggested that people make sure that they're adding to the conversation and refraining from personally attacking the author of this post or other commenters.

Here, MorningGloria attempts to reframe the conversation, emphasizing that people may comment as much as they want about the tragic nature of the post while sidestepping sidestepping the source of Agumen's frustration—an echo chamber, it seems, is not objectionable so long as it is not an echo chamber of critique. It should be noted that the only personal attack in all 163 comments occurs earlier in this thread, when MmeSosostris calls MorningGloria a "pet commenter."

[15] From "Know Comment" (Holmes, 2010b): "If you don't agree with a fellow commenter or one of the Jezebel writers/editors, you are strongly encouraged to make your point—calmly and civilly. […] In addition, from time to time we become aware of longstanding resentments and issues between commenters or directed at Jezebel writers/editors. The public spaces on this site are not the places in which to air those grievances or engage in threadjacking. If you have a problem with a fellow commenter or one of the writers/editors, you can private message ("PM") the individual(s) or take it outside the blog entirely via email or some other method.
We will not tolerate YELLING at us or at other commenters, and that goes for the use of ALLCAPS, over-the-top punctuation (!!!???), excessive sarcasm, overheated rhetoric, hyperbole and ad hominem attacks. It's pretty simple: If you can't make your point and discuss an issue rationally, you will not be allowed to comment on Jezebel."

One more commenter joins the discussion, engaging deeply with MorningGloria's instruction to add to the conversation, attempting to explain why people are so upset and expressing the commenter's discomfort with the way the topic was approached.

> **Dames (2010):** @morninggloria I can only speak for myself, but I wonder if part of the vitrol around these parts is that other than the sadness that many of us feel for this poor young man, what else is there to discuss from this article that would be "adding" to the conversation? Most of posts that don't deal with how this is sad appear to be additional attempts at laughs, which ... is the problem most posters seems to have had with the article in the first place. I guess what I'm struggling to articulate here is that the conversation that was started with the article (that of a joke involving a dead homeless man and the Twilight movie) many consider to be in poor taste, so what are we left to discuss? An earnest conversation about homelessness issues seems to be more respectful than the original piece, which together doesn't really compute for Jezebel and many of the people who gather here.

This comment is polite in its request for clarification and, for someone interested in accountability, useful for reaching a mutual understanding. MorningGloria, however, is not interested in mutual understanding.

> **MorningGloria (2010d):** @Dames I hear you, but maybe that's an example of a time to avoid reading/commenting. Vote with your mouse.

If the only possible response is a critical one, she says, do not respond at all. Jezebel: love it or leave it.

As of 2019, Dames has not posted since September 2010; MorningGloria was eventually rewarded with a staff writer position.

Hugo Schwyzer and a record of accountability

Questions of Jezebel's values came to a head in Jezebel's association with Hugo Schwyzer, a prominent self-styled male feminist who also taught gender studies courses at Pasadena City College. Between November 2011 and January 2013, Schwyzer published over 100 articles with Jezebel, the first of which, "The Problem With Being 'Sexy But Not Sexual,'" was very well

received by the commenters, who called it "thoughtful," "amazing," and "great." Over time, however, his penchant for writing about his female students and edgy sexual topics like anal sex, "barely legal" porn, and sex toys—usually but not always separately—began to turn some commenters off. Commenters lodged complaints about the tone and content of his posts, particularly his propensity for writing sex and behavior advice to women based on his own desires and framing it as a "gendered social issue" (CHIEF QUEEF, 2013a). Others had a problem with his repeated writing about the bodies and sexuality of college-age women (batlife, 2013). After all, as he himself publicized in the 2011 post "The Real Reason You Shouldn't Fuck Your Professor" (his answer is that "the reality of an actual relationship is likely to be disappointing"), he had slept with his students in the past,[16] which to many commenters indicated that there were probably better people for Jezebel to hand the microphone to.

The unfolding of the next set of events demonstrates both Jezebel's position within a tangled network of platforms discussing contemporary feminist issues and its efforts to curate its own archive. On January 2011, shortly after publishing his first post for Jezebel, Schwyzer posted on his personal blog about the time thirteen years before when, at the age of 31, he had attempted to kill both his girlfriend and himself while depressed and on drugs (see Ramos-Chapman, 2012; Schwyzer has removed his entire blog). Jezebel did not publicly acknowledge the post, nor did they stop hiring him to write increasingly titillating articles like "He Wants to Jizz on Your Face, But Not Why You Think." The murder-suicide post went largely unremarked upon in general, and Schwyzer also continued writing for Feministe and for male feminist blog The Good Men Project. Then, in December 2011, an interview with gender blog Role/Reboot in which he discussed having slept with his students caught the attention of the Feministe

[16] It was revealed in 2013 that he had in fact been still sleeping with students at the time of this post (Grenoble, 2013).

commenters (Jezebel's commenters, of course, already knew), who dug further into his blog. Having uncovered the post about the attempted murder-suicide, the commenters confronted the editors about giving a man with a history of sleeping with his students and attempting to murder women a platform on an explicitly feminist blog (Gable, 2014). On January 17, 2012, the editors of Feministe posted an apology and promised not to link to or promote Schwyzer in the future (see Gable, 2014; Feministe archives are unavailable). Jezebel continued to employ him for another full year.

In late 2011, before Feministe's public statement, a Jezebel commenter who was also either a reader of Schwyzer's blog or a commenter at Feministe linked to the murder-suicide blog post in the comments of one of Schwyzer's articles ("The Popularity and Perfectionism Behind Butt Sex"). Branwenmaeve wrote, "It must be great, having a spot on a feminist-leaning website and getting all these women to talk to you about their sex lives, not bad for a guy who tried to murder his girlfriend in her sleep" (branwenmaeve, 2011a). In the twenty-five comments that followed, commenters went back and forth about whether having made a terrible decision in the past should preclude someone from having a voice in the present. In response to sentiments that Schwyzer should be allowed to have a career, branwenmaeve replied:

> **branwenmaeve (2011b):** He's free to say whatever the hell he wants, and if some website/magazine/whatever wants to pay him for the privilege, they are free to spend (waste) their money accordingly. I, however, am also free to show up and remind any women who are tempted for half a second to take him seriously as a "male feminist" that the man isn't just obnoxious, he has a history of dangerous, predatory behavior right up to the point of trying to murder his ex (because she looked "too fragile" no less) in her sleep. A lot of women might want to know about that little piece of information when they consider what to make of his opinions and current posturing as an expert on women's issues.

Several commenters thanked her for providing the information and expressed their disgust that Schwyzer was writing for Jezebel. From then on, the link to the blog post was regularly shared or

referred to in the comments on Schwyzer's articles—both for the editors ("Because I like Jezebel to remember that they've employed someone with a history of domestic violence and that that maybe makes some of their readers uncomfortable!" [ladylattemotif, 2012a]) and, increasingly, for other commenters.

> **ajdfkrgri (2013):** Wow I had no idea until I read your comment and thought you were a troll. Then I googled his name. WTF.
>
> **Dong Johnson (2013):** Wow, I had no idea this guy was such a piece of shit! I've always thought that he's a shitty writer with no significant insight to offer, but now I really wish they'd stop promoting him. Awful.

As time passed, commenters became increasingly frustrated with the fact that Schwyzer's writing continued to appear on the site, especially given the proximity of his topics to his transgressions and the growing movement against him in other feminist quarters.

> **FLOWERSSHE1 (2013):** Why is Hugo allowed to write here? [1,170 more question marks]
>
> **bookaholic_au (2013):** Isn't it time that Schwyzer stopped posting here? He's been exiled from most of the feminist blogs with good reason, let's get rid of him here.
>
> **SketchesofWinkle (2013):** Has Jessica Coen ever addressed why she lets this guy post on Jezebel? Almost everyone with previous knowledge of his work dislikes him. It appears he gets by here solely on the basis of 75% of the readership at any one time either not knowing his history/previous work or not connecting what they've read to a specific writer. A few people deep down in the comments mention attempted murder and predatory sexual behavior, but it remains lost on most of the readership. A fresh 75% will still be there to greet him the next time something is posted.

SketchesofWinkle's comment serves not simply to indirectly call out the editors but also to provide a counternarrative for why Schwyzer's pieces continued to pull in pageviews and comments—that not enough people knew the truth. SketchesofWinkle's comment then serves in part to combat that problem, altering at least some of that 75 percent of the readership to Schwyzer's checkered history. Other comments perform their awareness of the more pecuniary reasons for Schwyzer's continued appearance:

> **BBWhatsit (2013):** I bet you're thinking, why is he writing a column for an ostensibly feminist site? The answer is, Nick Denton likes to roll around naked in piles of pound coins and starving orphans, and every time Hugo writes someone is compelled to explain this, invite you to google how he attempted to murder his girlfriend and then commit suicide (but failed due to a mechanical failure rather than a failure of will), and then—via the magic of the Kinja commenting system—pageviews are generated.
>
> **CHIEF QUEEF (2013b):** Yup. We inflict the Hugo on ourselves.

While advocating for his removal, they acknowledge their complicity in allowing him to stay. The commenters here create a record that deliberately invokes the comment section as both community and archive, while also locating that community in the larger operations of Jezebel as a whole. Gawker Media policies placed an emphasis on the permanence of the comment record. Once posted, a comment could not be edited or deleted except by site editors, contributing to the idea that posting to the comment section was a hefty and permanent act. However: looking at the comments on Schwyzer's articles, an empty shape begins to emerge.

> **Possibility (2012):** These keep getting moved to #offtopic but WHY has Jezebel decided to continue posting Hugo Schwyzer articles? There may be an reason, but doesn't it at least merit a recognition of the fact that he's been pretty much ostracized in the feminist community at large as of late??
>
> **Burnersinparis (2013):** Bump! Thank you, thank you. The writers on here don't even try to hide their bullshit double standards anymore. What I also love about this site is that actually troll comments are allowed to stay up unless YOU report it to #trollpatrol, but disagree with the content of one of the writer's post and they'll scrub it away as fast as they can.
>
> **ladylattemotif (2012b):** Does anyone notice how the vast majority of the comments criticizing Hugo Schwyzer's presence on this website (as a statutory rapist and attempted murderer) have been deleted? Curiouser and curiouser.
>
> **dgoat (2012):** Speaking of dumb ideas, how about the one where a sexual predator and domestic abuser is given a platform to talk about his unique take on feminism? Or the one where anyone putting the author's history of abusing women up for discussion leads to instantly muting the conversation?

-ridley- (2012): +1 before this gets moderated to the hashtag ghetto.

Toppins (2013): QUICK! Google "Hugo Schwyzer attempted murder."

For commenters bent on creating an alternative record, the manipulability of the commenting archive became a matter of some concern. In this sample, we see multiple commenters pushing back against Schwyzer while acknowledging that their contributions will likely not survive moderation (their current visibility suggests that they did). Taken together, these comments suggest the presence of other comments lost to the record, comments that are perhaps even more confrontational. These ghost comments, either moved via hashtag (also the favored Jezebel method of handling trolls) or deleted altogether, highlight the instability of the record. Even for readers at the time, who would see moved comments replaced by an "#offtopic" hashtag, there loomed the possibility of deleted comments that were scrubbed from the record altogether. Indeed, the existence of the comments hashtagged #offtopic serves two purposes. First, by leaving the hashtag and simply moving the offending comment, editors literally make an example of the comment, showing commenters what kind of discourse is crossing the line (such comments are still visible by clicking through to the hashtag). But, insidiously, the presence of these grave markers creates the illusion that what is appearing on the site is the complete record when in fact this may not be—sometimes *is* not—the case.

The comment archive of Schwyzer's articles contain many positive responses and a good number of negative ones, usually responding to his somewhat purple prose or habit of putting every topic through the lens of his own experiences. Discussions of his past or challenges to his right to take up space on a feminist site are comparatively scarce—sometimes as many as eight or nine comment threads, sometimes none at all. But there is no way to know how distorted these numbers are, especially given that during one of the many Kinja updates, the contents of the

"hashtag ghetto" disappeared altogether—nor does the current architecture maintain the gray/block hierarchy of the earlier commenting system, so there is no way to know whether given comments were demoted by the powers that be. Attempts like burnersinparis's to use the architecture to "bump" comments to the top of the comment section record through their replies could have been effective, or they could have been counteracted by the editors and moderators; from 2019, alas, there is no way to tell.

Despite the burgeoning anger in the comment section, neither Coen nor the other editors ever addressed these concerns, although they occasionally entered the fray to clarify one of Schwyzer's points. For instance, in response to a comment saying that Schwyzer had not actually answered the question of why students should not sleep with their professors, Coen quoted the paragraph in question with the quick disclaimer, "[w]hether you agree with his reasoning or not" (Coen, 2011). While this slight hedging could be interpreted to mean that Coen did not personally want Schwyzer's work appearing on the site, any tied-hands deniability would be shattered by how his eventual departure was handled.

After having ignored commenters' objections to Schwyzer's behavior for years, the powers that be were forced to confront them when Schwyzer had a public Twitter meltdown in which he called himself out as a fraud who had sustained himself on the attention his so-called feminism garnered and admitted to leveraging his whiteness and bullying feminists of color (Rosenthal, 2013). The meltdown, in which Schwyzer describes having marshalled white feminists like Jessica Valenti, Jill Filipovic, and Jessica Coen around him as a form of protection, occurred on August 9, 2013; on August 12, Coen published a self-addressed, second-person piece on the "stages of grief" of coming to terms with having been manipulated by Schwyzer (who goes unnamed). She concluded with acceptance:

> You did what you thought was right at the time. You didn't quantifiably benefit from running his work, but you liked what he brought to the table. Months after you stopped working together, things got profoundly fucked up, but it doesn't entirely invalidate the exchange of ideas and the discussions that stemmed from his work. That was good. There's not much you can do at this point other than to distance yourself and walk away the wiser, having learned a few things about dealing with manipulative dicks. (Coen, 2013b)

Commenters were livid, pointing out that it was disingenuous to act surprised by something that people had been telling her for years, that despite not considering Jezebel to be a feminist site it was irresponsible to have given such a person a voice on "what *most of your readers* think is a place to learn about feminism 101" (barelylethal: shitass, 2013)—and that, yes, due to Gawker Media's pageview structure, Coen had indeed quantifiably benefitted from Schwyzer (Alexandra Erin, 2013). Although Coen attempted to rewrite the record, commenters pushed back sharply, with yvanehtnioj adding another entry to the stages of grief:

> **yvanehtnioj (2013):** RATIONALIZATION: In spite of the fact that many, many people pointed out that he was exactly what he has just confessed to being, dismiss that feedback as "mountains of shit" that apparently had no impact on the fact that running his work was "what you thought was right at the time."

Other commenters point to Jezebel's scrubbing of the record, including deleting comments and banning commenters for speaking out. For example, _ridley_ (2013), presumably the -ridley- quoted above, wrote "I got banned for complaining about Schwyzer a year or two ago, so I'm all set w/ Coen's "I didn't know" defense. She knew." Even while commenters were pointing out that most of the critical comments were deleted from the old posts, critical comments were being deleted from Coen's post as well; DBIsaBiasedIdiot (2013) wrote to thank another commenter for recommending their post, which, they said, had since been dismissed. Despite commenters' best efforts, in the end any intervention in the narrative of Jezebel was always going to be contingent on editors' willingness to let it stand.

Resisting Jezebel's White Feminism

While the bulk of the resistance to Schwyzer continued to revolve around his history, as 2013 progressed, commenters had also pointed to another problem: his treatment of feminists of color. Spursforever (2013) wrote that Schwyzer "got a Latina feminist fired from a blog because she said his presence on feminist sites was triggering," and pazuzu asserted that Schwyzer "likes to search his name on Twitter and then 'engage' with people critical of him," adding that, specifically, they had seen him "say dismissive things and demand things of WoC." Such comments received no response from Jezebel.

Despite having been founded by a self-identified biracial woman (Anna Holmes) and having a self-identified black woman as one of its first full-time staffers (Dodai Stewart), Jezebel developed a reputation for being bad with race. The now-defunct Jezebel response blogs STFU Jezzies and Fuck No, Jezebel often mocked both commenters and editors for their white-centric opinions, and both Holmes and Stewart became frustrated enough with the white feminism of the comment section to write comment guides specifically about how to engage with race (for example, not jumping into the comments of an article about black Barbies to talk about how hard it was to find representation as a redhead [Stewart, 2009b]). Some commenters of color found the atmosphere so unwelcoming that they decamped to Groupthink (archives not available) or left Jezebel altogether. But to write Jezebel off as purely a white feminist space would be to deny some of the complicated work being done by and in support of women of color in the comment space—despite (and sometimes in response to) the red-headed Barbie effect—and on the mainpage, where as an antidote to the whiteness of mainstream magazines Holmes made sure to publish about once an hour a single, standalone image of a woman (usually of color) somewhere in the world, just going about her day.

Nevertheless, Jezebel's white feminism can be traced all the way back to its name (which a 2017 Guardian article reports that Holmes "hated" [Smith, 2017])). Although originating with a Bible temptress, the term "Jezebel" has come to represent the objectifying sexualization of black women (Pilgrim, 2012). Jezebel the website, however, was represented by the image of a blonde bombshell, bisected into full-color and black-and-white halves as though to represent the "real" woman beneath media depictions. Nor did the "Love letter to the most awesome blog name in the universe," published on the day of Jezebel's debut, acknowledge the racialized history of the term, using the term instead to point to "frank, sexually-liberated 'naughty' women who actually have a modicum of substance" (Moe, 2007a). When accessing the post through the Internet Wayback Machine (Moe, 2007c), one comment does indeed call out this racial usage, as f-words writes, "Any concern about the racial connotations of the term? Of the common stereotypes held about black women, one is termed the 'Jezebel,' the sexually insatiable and predatory black woman. I don't know how often that come to mind to most people when they hear 'Jezebel,' but I've encountered a few raised eyebrows." That comment, and that comment only, is missing from the version of the article currently housed on the Jezebel site, although due to the limited function of the Internet Wayback machine there is no way to know when or by whom it was removed. Given Anna Holmes' African American heritage and her articulated commitment to honoring the experiences of women of color, the deletion of the comment is curious. This inconsistent record, however, shows that the comment section resisted Jezebel's treatment of women of color from literally Day One.

Nowhere in her response to the Schwyzer meltdown did Coen acknowledge her own complicity in the silencing of women of color both on and off Jezebel, and so commenters stepped in to do it for her. "Do you guys ever, like, NOT fuck up when it comes to addressing

issues concerning women of color?" asked Maxine Shaw, attorney at LOL (2013). "This piece is everything—and I mean EVERY MOTHERFUCKING THING—wrong with feminism as far as WOC are concerned."

> **Sousaphone (2013):** Nope. Y'all done effed up. Black feminists and other WOC feminists called this a long time ago. Nope. You don't get to sit there and write about your stages of grief. where the fuck were you guys when HS was attacking black feminists, having manipulative relationships with his students, teaching courses on feminism when his ass wasn't even qualified to talk shit about feminism, when he tried to kill his girlfriend and all the other shady shit he has pulled? Uh-uh. Nope.

Despite having been promoted into the black by commenters, this pointed comment was demoted and re-grayed by an editor, a move that certainly undermined any claim to understanding of the harm Jezebel's actions had caused. In response to this resistance, Captain Awkward (2013) wrote a long, gentle comment parsing out the two separate conversations that should be happening: the first about Coen's own experience being gaslit, and the second about how Coen had "used [her] influence & clout to give him a platform over the objections, warnings, & hurt of women." It was that second conversation, Captain Awkward said, where Coen should have addressed

> how maybe it is not coincidental that HS's biggest detractors & victims were women of color & why they do not trust you or mainstream feminist spaces. It's where you talk about who gets the benefit of the doubt & whose opinion gets discounted. It's where we talk about how abusers infiltrate spaces and pee in the pool & what people can do as "gatekeepers" to vet contributors. It's where you might start to try to earn back that trust. If you want to earn back that trust. Do you? (Captain Awkward, 2013)

No response from Coen ever came. Instead, the next day, there was another elision of Jezebel's complicity in the silencing of feminists of color.

The same day Coen posted "Stages of Grief," black feminist Mikki Kendall had been arguing with white feminist Jill Filipovic on Twitter. Perceiving that in the wake of Schwyzer's Twitter meltdown Filipovic, who had employed Schwyzer on Feministe, had been defending him at the expense of women of color, Kendall created the hashtag #solidarityisforwhitewomen to

point to the ways that white feminists like Filipovic and Jezebel had enabled Schwyzer by providing him a platform. White feminists, Kendall said, were continuing a century-old practice of "dismissing women of color (WOC) in favor of a brand of solidarity that centers on the safety and comfort of white women" (Kendall, 2013). The next morning, Jezebel editor Erin Gloria Ryan[17] (2013) posted a list of "Our Favorite #solidarityisforwhitewomen Tweets" that did not acknowledge Jezebel's role in the hashtag's origin. Worse, the post, intended to highlight how white women center themselves to the exclusion of women of color, *did not mention Mikki Kendall at all*.

The 174 comments pointed almost universally to the dual omission, with several commenters linking to a tweet by Kendall herself about her elision. Although Ryan eventually updated with an acknowledgment of Kendall's role, the update discussed neither the tone-deafness of the initial omission nor Jezebel's complicity in the hashtag's origin. In a move that marks how distinct the comment section considered itself from the Jezebel brass, several commenters suggested that perhaps Ryan, who had formerly been a mere commenter herself, was being silenced by the administration; one comment linking to a Groupthink post collecting several of Ryan's tweets denouncing Schwyzer from her personal account (DeletingYourProfileIsImpossible, 2013).

Several months later, Miley Cyrus gave her controversial 2013 MTV Video Music Awards performance in which she twerked, slapped the derrieres of her black female backup dancers, and mimed analingus on one of them. Jezebel's coverage, focusing on the slut-shaming aspects of the media discussion, failed to touch on the racial implications of the performance. Jezebel commenter NinjaCate, who is black, took advantage of the Kinja blogging platform to

[17] Formerly the commenter morninggloria.

write a personal blog post titled “Solidarity is for Miley Cyrus” both calling out Jezebel’s failure and stepping into the gap (NinjaCate, 2013). She cross-posted her piece to Groupthink, and in a rare moment of accountability the main Jezebel page published it as well. In this instance, NinjaCate was able to use the Kinja architecture to push back on Jezebel directly and in a spectacularly public fashion; as of this writing, the post has been viewed 1.6 million times. As a commenter and not a staffer, NinjaCate received no compensation.

Conclusion

“MizJenkins” never returned to Jezebel, but the woman behind the commenting handle did. In her post for Persephone Magazine, she detailed how after MizJ was banned the second time, she developed a persona under the handle MizX:

> I decided that MizX would be “more Black” in that she would adopt a vernacular and espouse concepts that are mainstream in Black America, instead of the kindergarten schoolteacher “voice” I sometimes used as MizJenkins and around my real life White friends who don’t really get it. But she would remain largely disengaged from any contentious discussions about race. Instead she would be far MORE strident on a number of other issues, espousing some of my more unpopular opinions (most of which it seems were excused or forgotten during the martyrdom of MizJenkins). (MizJenkins, 2011)

By contrast, a second MizJenkins persona, posting under the handle “Darling Becky,” was conceived as a straw racist who would enter the comment section to espouse ignorant talking points so that friends of MizJenkins (or strangers, if they were so inclined) could articulate the error of her ways. Despite focusing her aggression elsewhere, MizX was only “officially silenced” by editors or moderators when she participated in discussions of race. The deliberately racist Darling Becky was never officially censured (MizJenkins, 2011).

Particularly when taken together, these two “characters” used the comment section as a performance space in complex rhetorical ways. MizX was a cathartic experiment in how the

feminists writing and commenting at Jezebel handled blackness when it was not modulated for their benefit—badly, it turned out. And by play-acting racist tropes, Darling Becky not only created a record of Jezebel's racist hypocrisy, but she also allowed anti-racist commenters to create a record of rebuttals that could both educate ignorant readers and serve as scripts for others who might encounter Darling Beckies in their lives. Moreover, because most of the people interacting with her understood it to be a put-on, this useful record was generated without the emotional labor of having to interact with a real-life racist.

More than a simple repository of reader reactions, the Jezebel comment section enacts a radical feminist textuality in resistance to the larger Jezebel performances of feminism. In many instances, commenters operate purposefully with a sense of their own on-the-record-ness, not just speaking but instantiating feminist interventions using whatever means are available. The comment section's sense of itself as a network and community creates a sense of collectivity that is often invoked in the service of performing alternative feminisms. Jezebel commenters conduct "rich rhetorical analysis" (Queen, 2008) as an act of self-interrogation, hyper-aware of how their participation is structured within Jezebel as a capitalist enterprise but nonetheless seeking to redefine the terms of Jezebel as a feminist community. Commenters leverage the commenting architecture but are also acutely conscious of the ways it can be weaponized against them, and as they construct their comments, they aim them both horizontally, to each other, and vertically, to the editors—as well as forward into the future for readers yet to come.

Crucially, most critiques of Jezebel's feminism express, tacitly or directly, a desire for Jezebel to be better. Complaints are usually not centered on tearing down the site but on building up a better version, helping it to fulfill its potential and become the site that, against much evidence, they have believed it to be—"you can do better," lucystrawberry wrote (2010).

Addressing not just Jessica Coen but all of the Jezebel staff, Bayareachick (2014) invokes the comment section as a body of evidence: "I really hope that you guys reconsider the direction that you are going with for this site. Long time readers have come to expect a hell of a lot more than what this article is doing—and as is clear from the comments nobody likes this." In posts like these, commenters self-consciously position their individual contributions in a network of discourse that includes both other comments and the main content of the site, both pushing for and instantiating change at the same time.

Because post-Anna Holmes Jezebel in particular struggled to cover racial topics in productive ways (and because the general population of commenters was little better or worse), the comment section also became a crucial site of antiracist (and racist) performance. Calls for accountability might not have resulted in direct action—the #solidarityisforwhitewomen article update was minimal and MizJenkins remained banned—but comments themselves were able to interfere in the narrative and provide some small form of justice.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Kinja, Trolls, and the Limits of Acceptable Dissent

In the aftermath of the Kinja transition, when disruptive comments were flooding in and the comment section was in chaos, several members of Groupthink began suggesting that the community maintain a list of "known trolls" to discourage people from wasting their time and rewarding disruptors with attention. But others objected, saying that without a shared definition, people were apt to get labeled as trolls (and thereby silenced) simply for disagreeing. When moderator Slay Belle posted to discourage people from making such lists—"not in the least because some people's definition of 'troll' is just 'someone who I don't like'" (2013a)—several commenters expressed their relief.

> **Joanbeam (2013):** That's fine by me, especially since no two people seem to have the same definition of troll and what constitutes trolling. Best to nip it in the bud so as to avert any chance of subjectivity and even pettiness being part of the mix. Thanks for posting this, Slaybelle.
>
> **ScarletHerring (2013):** Thank you. This whole troll hysteria is getting old. Discourse is not served by talking meta about it every 20 minutes. I could understand it in the beginning as people were uncomfortable and it fostered unity but it's well past that point now and is starting to look nasty.

Despite the moratorium on official watchlists, names of suspected trolls continued to circulate informally as commenters gathered and exchanged updated notes on their troll experiences. In one thread on a post about how to handle possible trolls in Groupthink, a commenter complained that someone was going around to people within that comment section and telling them "'Stop talking to them, they're an ____-hating troll, read their history"' (3-I, 2013b). Another commenter replied to say that she thought that might be happening in response to another

comment thread, wherein the accused troll had engaged in "a barrage of name-calling" and other offensive behavior (lurkerbynature, 2013).

While Jezebel's first five years were marked by increasing conflict between commenters and editors, the introduction of Kinja, with its lack of institutional gatekeeping and increased commenter moderation, added a horizontal dimension as well. Whereas prior to Kinja, commenters could report the occasional suspected troll to moderators or editors and trust that they would use their judgment, now the need for judgment had devolved onto the commenters themselves, who would have to decide on an individual basis what kinds of discourse did and did not belong in the commenting space.

In this chapter, I argue that the advent of Kinja forced the Jezebel comment section to collectively reckon with its boundaries in a way it had never done before. Where before, the question of what was acceptable on a feminist(-ish) site had been directed vertically, toward regulating the editors, now it was also directed horizontally, toward other commenters. Commenters had new power to shape what kind of feminism would be instantiated in the comment section. While attention was certainly still directed toward regulating the editorial discourse (several of the controversies discussed in Chapter Three took place in the post-Kinja era), commenters now also turned their attention to determining their own limits of acceptable dissent and who and what the commenting space was for. Debates about what constitutes trolls and trolling, I contend, are a crystallization of this process. Drawing on discussions from Jezebel's back-channel forum, Groupthink, I first map out what is at stake in Jezebel's attempts to define trolling. Then, I explore two competing frameworks that shape commenters' approaches—the label can be earned either through behavioral or ideological violation, each of which can be traced to a different etymology of the term "troll"—and in doing so, I offer a way

of parsing competing ideas about what trolls are, what they do, and the kinds of threats they pose to Jezebel commenter discourse. Finally, I examine moments when commenters mark the limits of acceptable dissent, where commenters attempt to draw the lines between trolling and standard deviation.

A methodological note before continuing**:** While all other material in this dissertation is taken from editorial posts and comments on the Jezebel mainpage, both this chapter and Chapter Five are built on comments and posts from Groupthink. Although Groupthink had been around since 2009, it survived the implementation of Kinja in an altered form. In April 2013, nine months after the initial removal of gatekeeping and addition of the dismiss button, Jezebel hit the reset button on Groupthink. Rather than being completely open, authorship privileges were at first restricted to hand-picked commenters with established comment histories. As such, these early discussions represent the reflections of core members of the community, people who are invested not only in Jezebel but also in the idea that comment discussions add something worthwhile to the discourse and are worth treating with serious consideration. When Groupthink 2.0 premiered, users almost immediately took to the forum as a place to discuss handling trolls, and the near-simultaneous implementation of these two architectural changes creates the rare opportunity to watch central players negotiate out loud and explicitly what it means to be a troll in their community and thereby, also, what ideal feminist discourse looks like online.

Conceptualizing trolling

It is important to note that although the Kinja system was implemented on all Gawker Media blogs, it was always going to have its strongest impact on Jezebel. As established by Herring et al. (2002) nearly twenty years ago and substantiated by numerous studies since (e.g. Cote, 2017;

Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2015; Veletsianos, Houlden, Hodson, & Gosse, 2018), women's spaces in general and feminist spaces in particular receive a disproportionate amount of harassment online. Kinja's jettisoning of its gatekeeping practices, then, had higher stakes for the commenters on Jezebel, which, as established in Chapter One, already had a high profile. Furthermore, research has shown that trolls are particularly drawn to people perceived as taking themselves too seriously (Phillips, 2015; Schwartz, 2008). As one of Mattathias Schwartz's self-identified troll sources put it in an interview for the *New York Times*, "You look for someone who is full of it, a real blowhard. Then you exploit their insecurities to get an insane amount of drama, laughs, and lulz" (2008). Jezebel's commenters, who were already the subject of Tumblr blogs devoted to mocking their self-serious performances of feminism, would—and arguably did—make for a natural target.

It is also important to note that, although in the world at large there seems to be agreement that trolling is disruptive, that is where consensus ends—the label has become a shapeless sack of a garment that gets popped onto everything from in-the-moment name-calling to organized harassment campaigns. In her definitional article, Claire Hardaker (Hardaker, 2010) points out that simple terms like "impoliteness," "rudeness," aggressive language," and "the causing of offense" are not enough to capture the meaning of trolling—although all are implicated in its execution. Christopher Hopkinson (2013) characterizes "troll" as an indiscriminately applied catch-all for "various styles of negatively evaluated online behavior" (p. 8), and Jonathan Bishop (2014) invokes Derrida's *différance* to argue that no one definition could ever fully capture the meanings "troll" accumulates as it circulates. It is a term equally applied to playfully provoking sci-fi fans (Brockway), dispensing bad advice on an equestrian message board (Hardaker, 2010), falsely posing as a jelly tycoon (Bergstrom, 2011), and posting

offensive and cruel images on the memorial page of a murder victim (Phillips, 2011). This indeterminacy makes talking about trolling both difficult and essential; semiotic drift means that a label with the power to silence and invalidate is often applied willy-nilly to anyone the least bit disruptive to the discourse conventions of the space. Without clear ideas of what is trolling and what is not, a potent term risks becoming tautological: if trolls are people we don't engage with, people we don't wish to engage with can all too easily be slapped with the label of "troll."

The definition of trolling must negotiated on a community-by-community basis—laying bare in the process the community's conception of itself and its values. As Julian Dibbell (1999) pointed out in his iconic study of "virtual rape" in an online forum he frequented, the presence of an antagonistic force tends to lead groups to shore up their boundaries, determining in more explicit ways what is and is not acceptable within the community. Christopher Hopkinson expands on this idea, arguing that trolling actually plays a "significant role" in community building by pressing members to define their values and social identity as a group. Even Herring, et al., despite focusing on the damage trolling can inflict upon vulnerable groups online, remark that "disruptive incidents" can also unintentionally strengthen a group's identity (p. 373).

Rather than trying to further nail down an external, "correct" definition of trolling, my interest in this chapter is to tease out how the term is deployed and negotiated within the Jezebel comment section—a definition-in-practice. Bishop argues that the fraught nature of "troll" is akin to that of "terrorist," a charged label that immediately turns its recipient into a malicious enemy. So understanding what the Jezebel commenters talk about when they talk about trolls is not merely a semantic question but an ideological one: in the comment section of a feminist-ish site, who counts as an enemy? And who is the "us" to their "them"?

Competing frameworks

Even just within Jezebel, there is no easy answer to the question of what counts as trolling. I contend that the way individual Jezebel commenters receive trolling behavior and perceive its effect on the group is partially determined by two competing frameworks. Trolling's definitional instability is built into its very foundation: as a homonym, the word contains dual signifieds that lead to two significantly different operational definitions, each with its own set of assumptions and its own set of embedded responses.

One conception of internet trolling comes from fishing: to troll is to bait a hook and dangle it enticingly, hoping the fish will bite so you can hook one and reel it in. Culture writer Robert Brockway (2013) describes the traditional, old-school troll as someone who would go to a *Stargate* discussion board and intentionally get the number of runes on a stargate wrong in the hopes of ferreting out that one person who can't quite let it slide. In this view, trolls needle people who take themselves seriously by giving them enough rope to hang themselves with. Although not all discussions of trolling cast it as such harmless lighthearted jackanapes, the key feature of this conception of trolling is that it is something that you *do*. It is a verb, not a noun.

The other origin of the term is from Norse mythology (Bergstrom, 2011). This formulation casts trolls as monsters who lurk under bridges waiting for someone to trip-trap along so they can jump out and change the narrative. This bridge troll takes delight in disorder. He (or she, but mostly he) is categorically disruptive, a force of bad intention, and he (or she) is out to get your goat. Here, a troll isn't something that a person *does*; it is something that a person simply *is*. But—and this is the key difference—a monstrous troll is not necessarily deceptive; they are just trollish by nature. Under this framework, "troll" becomes an all-purpose term to

describe people whose activities and opinions might be inflammatory, offensive, or disruptive, even if those opinions are expressed in all sincerity.

I argue that which metaphor a forum participant subscribes to guides how he or she responds to incidents of trolling. As Phillips (2015) observes, "[t]he speaker's attitudes toward trolls and trolling behaviors often color his or her understanding of the term's origins. If he or she sees trolling as mean-spirited and abusive, he or she is more likely to link trolling with the snarling, monster variety. If he or she is ambivalent or even sympathetic to trolling, his or her account will often make mention of the more value-neutral fishing term" (p. 15). Where the fishing metaphor encourages examination of the individual act (invalidating a single post), the bridge metaphor encourages the identification and labeling of the individual (invalidating a person). The imagery, too, brings different aspects of trolling activity to the foreground. Fishing has deception at its core, a hook hidden in innocent-looking prey. People concerned with this kind of trolling fear getting duped into wasting time and energy or contributing to accidentally derailing the conversation. The monster imagery, on the other hand, focuses on the disruptive effects, the monstrosity of the interloper. A person who infiltrates can still be a troll in this view, but so can a person who pops up in the comments overtly spewing misogyny and homophobia. Interestingly, the admonition to avoid feeding the troll does not necessarily belong to one metaphor or the other; the imagined troll could either be the monster lurking under the bridge or the fisherman waiting to dine on commenters foolish enough to take the bait. While I do not claim that each time a commenter uses "troll" they are consciously referring to either bridges or fishing lines, the fishing-action/monster-noun pairings map onto the way the term is mobilized in discussions of trollish behavior. These two formulations of trolling—the fishing framework and

the monster framework—structure much of the conflict on Jezebel over what does and does not count as a troll.

The following comment demonstrates this distinction in operation. In a debate over whether the label of "troll" had been merited in a particular instance, commenter 3-I replied:

> **3–I (2013a):** Like, okay, namecalling was happening. I think "Don't feed the troll" is probably alright on blatant trolling posts. Bbut that isn't quite what I'm describing. The message was on a thread in which the alleged troll was giving an argument that seemed reasoned and internally logically consistent, and the "This person is a troll, check their history and stop responding" came the hell out of nowhere. So, uh. I guess what I'm getting at is... If... they're not trolling on that thread in particular, don't do it? I don't--I just don't even know.

The tension here between wanting to label people and objecting to the very idea is the tension between the monster framework and the fishing framework. In this comment, 3-I pushes back against the idea of someone being dismissed wholesale because of their past actions—the individual actions may be objectionable, but they do not merit the silencing of a whole person. When they describe other commenters discouraging interaction, those commenters are portrayed as having used the monster framework, troll-as-noun: they are *a troll*; 3-I, on the other hand, uses the fishing metaphor to look at trolling as an activity that is sometimes engaged in: they are trol*ling*. Within the fishing framework, this implies, other users are less threatened by the actions—behaviors are unwelcome, but people are not.

Between April and October 2013, "troll," trolling," and related variants appeared in a total of 232 Groupthink posts, each with its own set of 4 to over 100 comments. Of those posts, 130 were specifically about trolls on Jezebel (as opposed to on other sites, or in offline contexts, or under actual bridges). To look for larger patterns in how the fishing and monster frameworks functioned during this time, I broke these 133 posts into three categories: posts that mentioned trolling in passing but were primarily about something else (27), posts about general approaches

to trolls on Jezebel (50), and posts about specific encounters with trolls (53). I opened each post, counted the number of times troll* appeared in the body (233 across the 130 posts), then characterized whether each appearance was modifier (13), verb (34)[18], or noun (a whopping 186). Additionally, I coded each of the 53 discussions of specific troll encounters according to what emotion the author was expressing: anger (13), confusion (3), annoyance (17), amusement (16), or no emotion (4).

I am using this brief quantitative study to orient further qualitative inquiry into how Jezebel commenters define trolling and orient their commenting behaviors accordingly. It establishes, for instance, that in this time period the monster framework appeared on Groupthink nearly six times as often as the fishing framework—and that, as per Phillips' observation, there was a correlation between the fishing framework and feeling neutral toward or amused by the incident. Out of the 11 times trolling appeared as a verb in the group of posts about specific troll encounters, only 1 of them is coded as "annoyed," as a commenter complains that she "got trolled" and "was dumb enough to respond" (citation). Two are written in a tone of academic interest—the commenter "noticed an interesting thread running through most of the trolls [he is] getting on the Class Privilege article" (citation). All of the remaining 8 are coded as amused. Conversely, no one who was angry said "trolling" or "trolled"; people who were upset only said "troll."

It is important to note that despite the fact that the monster framework is so much more prominent than the comparatively cheerful fishing framework, trolling as a concept is not demonized among the commenters of Groupthink. Indeed, it may make more sense to refer to the

[18] For the purposes of this research, noun-based usage such as "I received some really funny trolls" would be coded as a verb, as the emphasis is on trolling as an activity.

monster troll not as an absolute identity but as a role—the term still functions as a label, and people can still "be" trolls, but it is understood that the person inhabits the troll rather than the troll inhabiting the person.

Deception and the trials of being new

Consciousness of Kinja's open floodgates—and a few encounters with especially disruptive new commenters—bred an atmosphere of paranoia and uncertainty in the comments. Research suggests that the mere suspicion that a commenter might be trolling can derail a thread, disintegrating the conversation into off-topic discussion and personal attack (Hopkinson), and that the resulting "uncivil and inflammatory" discourse muddies the conversational waters and discourages the engagement of genuine discussion seekers (Lampe, Zube, Lee, Park, & Johnston, 2014, p. 317). In his 2001 discussion of the internet's viability as a public sphere, Lincoln Dahlberg points out that identity deception damages trust within communities. Participants may be more suspicious and reluctant to engage with other posters, he writes, and they might reduce their contributions to the group or even stop speaking altogether (2001). And, as Herring et al. (2002) point out, the asynchronous nature of communication in the forums extends trolls' disruptive effects, making it much more difficult for conversation to return to the subject at hand. In the long run, encounters with deceptive trolls can damage trust within communities by making it difficult for participants to take anything anyone says at face value (Donath, 1999).

In her ethnography of trolls, Phillips (2015) characterizes this concern with deception as a hand-wringing relic of early (and foolishly optimistic) conceptions of the Internet: "not only were these trolls a threat to the utopian dream of early cyberspace, they gestured to the norms against which their behaviors were said to transgress—namely that 'true' identities do not

deceive, that any form of deception undermines community formation, and even more basically, that pure communication is naturally and necessarily preferable to some inauthentic alternative" (p. 16). Yet this perspective oversimplifies why the deception is troubling to the communities in question. When Donath writes that "in a group that has become sensitized to trolling—where the rate of deception is high—many honestly naive questions may be quickly rejected as trollings" (p. 14) she is not arguing that people refuse to engage because they fear potential trolls may not be who they say they are. Rather, she is saying that people fear getting tricked into fruitless discussion with someone who has no intention of listening; trolls, she writes, cause the most harm by "diverting the discussion off the newsgroup topic and into a heated argument" (p. 16). The fear is not the masquerade itself but infiltration by an agent provocateur; nobody *cares* if you're a dog on the internet, just so long as you're not rabid.

The fear of being tricked by someone who is not engaging in good faith is very present in Groupthink discussions of trolls. Often, Groupthink commenters blame their engagement with trolls on having been taken in by interactions that seemed innocuous at first.

> **zap rowsdower (2013):** I've gotten duped before. They replied fine to something I said about Questlove and then I come back and they are making anti-Semitic remarks.
>
> **Pope Alexander (2013)**With me it's more that they'll initially say something I don't totally agree with, but it's not offensive or totally objectionable. So I'll engage and then it turns CRAZY.
>
> **Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide (2013a):** There are a few people commenting on that post who are trolls, IMHO. They frequent these parts, and they try to act all "OMG I am so down with you guys, hahaha you're the best!" But they are fucking trolls.

The idea that even seemingly ordinary posts can be hiding bad intentions makes many commenters careful about who they engage with and can make it difficult for new members—especially those who may be new to feminism itself, and who therefore may be asking a lot of questions or making seemingly uneducated statements—to integrate into the Jezebel community.

Without a reliable way to differentiate oneself from the trolls in the grays, new and unfeatured commenters worried about their genuine questions and mistakes being interpreted as trolling.

> **nutbrownrose (2013):** only discovered GT like, *last week*, and comment rarely on Jez….HOWEVER: I *really* don't want to be a troll, but I'm afraid of being one. I don't know how to not except be *honestly* curious and polite, but am afraid I will be taken as a troll in spite of that. (irrational inferiority complex—go!) So an honest question: How do I prevent myself ever being taken as a troll, even when I misunderstand something?

Although nutbrownrose's question about avoiding being labeled a troll received only two responses, those answers illuminate behaviors that Jezebel community members interpret as signifying troll status and point toward the limits of acceptable dissent.

> **Jess, Queen of the Raptors (2013):** If you misunderstand something, and ask for clarification, and then LISTEN when people respond - you're probably not a troll. If, however, you keep asking obnoxious, disingenuous follow up questions and/or argue with the response you get, people will not like that, and you might fall into troll territory.

> **Sea Anenome (2013):** "How do I prevent myself ever being taken as a troll?" You can't. You can be polite, and there will still be people who will call you a troll. My advice is don't be troll-y, that is, don't stir up controversy for just the sake of being Devil's advocate. If someone still wants to call you a troll, it's on them.
>
> Otoh, if you make a lot of anti-feminist, patriarchy appeasing, or otherwise idiotic statements and you get called troll, that's on you.

Some of these guidelines are behavioral—listening, demonstrating sincerity, avoiding playing devil's advocate, being polite, keeping follow-up questions non-obnoxious and genuine. These are ways to reassure commenters that they are not being tricked into wasting their time and energy on someone with no desire to learn. Others—anti-feminism, patriarchy-appeasing—are more ideological, pointing toward particular points of view that violate community boundaries and demonstrate the limits of acceptable dissent.

Suspicion and isolation of new commenters is not helped by Kinja's tiered commenting system. Ostensibly, the tiered system is designed to improve the visibility of quality discourse while minimizing disruptions. Comments from non-established commenters appear in a light

gray font rather than black, and instead of appearing by default beneath the article, they require multiple extra clicks for access. This means that not everyone on the site has to be subjected to someone calling Barack Obama the n-word while innocently reading the comments on an article. But it also means that any commenter who has not been awarded featured status is lumped in with such comments. There is an expectation that featured commenters will read through the comments "in the grays" and promote individual quality contributions to black, but because of the extra effort it takes to access them and the risk of encountering offensive content along the way, gray comments receive less interaction than their black counterparts, effectively silencing voices not already endorsed by Jezebel administrators and discouraging participation. In the following exchange, commenters discuss how the tiered system stifles discourse, particularly from non-mainstream points of view:

> **MykittenbitmebutIlovehim (2013)**: Since when does doesn't agree equal troll….I understand the need to sift out trolls however the issue with 'the greys' and the whole recommendation system means that essentially if someone doesn't agree with the consensus of opinion on Jez their comments are regarded as illegitimate by Big Brother Kinja. They won't be recommended because they don't agree. How do you have open debate? How can you check your privilege? How do you see opposing views?...Lets have open, honest and diverse debate. My view as a POC will be different to a WASP will be different to LGBT will be different to differently abled etc etc.
>
> > **Pyrax (2013):** I'm gray on the main page too and it makes me not comment - I never get replies and most of the time I wonder if anyone even read my comment.

A key tool in determining a given commenter's troll status is their comment history. These archives, accessible by clicking on a username, allow commenters to look at every comment the suspected troll has ever made, and thereby judge whether the current interaction is being conducted in good faith. Comments on posts about trolling are filled with exhortations to check people's histories before responding to their posts to avoid being fooled. Indeed, having one's comment history checked by a moderator is part of the process of being approved to post on

Groupthink. With the tier system discouraging less prominent commenters from participating, however, new commenters were even less likely to develop the kind of history that would exonerate them from troll status, and commenters with shorter comment histories may have a harder time being accepted into the community.

> **therealquash (2013)**: I think a problem arises when people don't "recognize" a commenter, and thus confuse nuance with trolling….I think we get so used to the so-called reasonable trolls (the ones that suck you in by begging for better understanding and then BOOM troll) that it is hard to distinguish real people with nuanced differences in opinions from those trolls.

An end result of viewing trolls as deceivers in sheep's clothing, then, was a chilling effect on new feminist commenters being able to join the community. While the monster/noun construction of a troll tends to be responded to more viscerally, it is the fear of deception that appears to actually stifle discourse. While it is possible that some people stopped participating on Jezebel because of offensive or aggressive encounters with trolls, such experiences were not discussed during the period under study.

Identifying the Limits of Acceptable Dissent

In this final section, I turn attention to the actual interactions in which commenters articulate (or attempt to) which kinds of ideological discourse are considered trolling in the Jezebel space. Unlike situations in which commenter fear deception, these ideological trolls receive their labels for crossing overt boundaries, challenging commenters to draw boundaries with their rejection. I take up the limits of acceptable dissent by looking at three iterations of boundary work: (1) straight-up, simple labels of particular behavior as trolling or not, (2) discussion of the presence of radical feminism, and (3) a debate between someone who has been labeled a troll and the commenters who labeled her.

i: He trolls me, he trolls me not

While some commenters take on the role of troll through their behavior, others are constructed into it by their position vis-a-vis the community's boundaries. That is, certain ideological positions are perceived by the community as being outside of the limits of acceptable dissent, constructing those who hold them as ipso facto trolls. For example, Groupthink posts mention "MRA trolls"[19] (4 appearances), "racist trolls" (4 appearances), and "pro-life trolls" (3 appearances). In these posts, these modifiers are treated not simply as contextual information but as inherent justifications for the troll label, indicating that speaking from these perspectives is antithetical to Jezebel's values and can only ever be disruptive, derailing, and unwelcome in this space. Thus the mere act of expressing certain ideas takes on the trolling function—entering a feminist space and espousing the ideas of the men's rights movement is considered an act of provocation. In one post, common anti-abortion talking points are cited as evidence of trollishness.

> **moweezy3 (2013):** Attempting to not feed the trolls, but the thing that's getting to me is the constant fear mongering that pro-lifers use like their whole bit about "cutting brainstems in half" and fetuses "screaming in pain." [...] Your freak out about "baby murder" is not EVER conducive to a good conversation about why women of all ages, races, and socioeconomic status need education and access.

The commenters in question may sincerely believe that abortion murders babies, but in the context of this discursive space, this is considered a derailing and disruptive line of conversation. We can see the fishing framework together with the monster framework in the title of a post by zap rowsdower: "I engaged with a pro-life troll - probably just a troll troll" (2013). In the doubled noun in the second part of the sentence—troll troll—the first occurrence of the word takes on an adjectival function: a "trollish" troll, a "trolly" troll, or a "trolling" troll. There

[19] MRA = men's rights activists

is a consciousness here of the difference between ipso facto trolls and their deceptive counterparts, but also an acknowledgement that regardless of which it is, the discursive outcome is the same, and even if the so-called troll is just messing with him or her, the pro-life position is still enough to merit the label. Nevertheless, there are a number of occasions when commenters remark that they hope certain commenters are trolls because they do not want to believe that there are people who truly believe those things (e.g. rokokobang, 2013); imaginaryfriend, 2013). Even if the effect on discourse is the same, the emotional impact can be somewhat lessened through the lens of the fishing framework.

The idea of someone who violates the limits of acceptable dissent being an ipso facto troll is an analog of Joseph Reagle's (2014) concept of the "obligation to know." Developed in his studies of geek feminist communities, the "obligation to know" is Reagle's name for the expectation that before attempting to join a conversation happening at the 200 or 300 level, newbies should make sure they have completed their 100-level prerequisites. Failing to adequately prepare and expecting others to do the work to educate you, Reagle says, functions to derail and disrupt the discussion even if your intentions are good. In the same way, even sincere expressions of belief can be disruptive—that is, trollish—if they are enough at odds with the values of the discourse community. At Jezebel certain shared values form the basis for entry, and speaking out against abortion demonstrates a fatal misalignment with those values.

Some commenters who are identified as trolls make no pretense of being part of the gang.

> **HermioneStranger (2013b):** The great thing about Patriarchy Forever is, he's a really *obvious* troll. It's the ones who come off as a bit unorthodox or a bit ignorant, or who seem like English isn't their first language, that can suck you in and get to to act like a dick before you realize they're a troll.

This comment recenters the definition of trolling on disruption rather than on deception: while the "unorthodox" thinkers may be trying to trick people into expending energy engaging them,

PatriarchyForever does not even pretend to play nice. While it is possible that his posts are deceptive in the sense that he does not truly believe what he is saying, the level of disruption to the discourse is the same whether he does or not. By entering the comment space already embodying the antithesis of feminism, he seems to leave all pretense of good faith behind. And yet:

> **HermionePond (2013):** The first time I saw one of [PatriarchyForever's] posts, I looked at his username and thought "Oh, who's going to fall for that?" (apparently a lot of people, but it was nice to dream at the time).

The thing being "fallen for" in this case is not a trick but rather the idea that engaging with someone so opposed to Jezebel's values could have any positive outcome; this consideration forms the backbone of Chapter Five.

In a number of cases, commenters weigh in to discussions of trolling to specifically point out what trolling is not. A person can be "X, but not a troll": a "self-righteous tool" (Jayne Allison, 2013), an asshole (Hello_America, Out for Blood, 2013a), a moron (Ubertrout, 2013b), a bad person (rawrglicious, 2013), or "an ignorant, fat-shaming asshat" (Ubertrout, 2013a). This construction of trolling can be interpreted two ways, depending on which framework one subscribes to. One is that these descriptors are not problematic enough to place them outside the limits of acceptable dissent (like a monster). The other is that although the behaviors are disruptive and perhaps unacceptable, they are not being engaged in to deliberately get a rise out of people and are therefore outside the demesne of trolling (as in fishing).

And yet not all problematic opinions are enough to warrant being labeled a troll. Longtime commenter Korra created a post titled "101 Level Course: Sexism and Racism Edition" that opens by saying "congratulations are in order: the person who redirected you here does not believe you are a troll" (Korra, 2013). The bulk of the post that follows is a list of links

on antiracism and feminism that "should be enough to start your journey towards productive conversation." The existence of such a post—which as of this writing had been viewed over 1,000 times and bookmarked 46—indicates that comments supporting the concepts of "reverse racism" and "reverse cultural appropriation" (or denying the concepts of male privilege and white female privilege), though unacceptable in the community, are not enough to invalidate someone specifically as a troll.[20]

ii: Feminist boundary work

That dropping the n-word or making overtly misogynistic comments would be considered disruptive in a feminist space is hardly a surprise. In the discussions that follow, however, the debates among commenters capture moments when the comment section seems to ask itself what kinds of feminism belong in the Jezebel comments. Here, in the realm of people who actually lay claim to the mantle, the community must negotiate the boundaries of feminism within this space. Though this would shock many of the site's detractors, on Jezebel the trolling label is not reserved solely for people deemed insufficiently progressive; commenters who seem too radical may also be designated trolls. In these cases, however, the stakes are different, as unlike trolls who use offensive language, such commenters might be perceived by outsiders as being within discursive norms.

This is evidenced in commenters' collectively ambivalent responses to possible troll, possible radical feminist commenter Jane Andress. In a post by chritter is a nocturnal feminist mancatfish about engaging entertaining trolls, HermioneStranger points to Jane Andress as "the best parody of a radfem" (HermioneStranger, 2013a):

[20] Even so, Korra disabled comments on the post—the commenter in question might not be a troll, but neither are they entitled to defend their ideas in this space.

> **HermioneStranger:** I especially recommend this [link] exchange with another troll, Maya Angelou (who is maybe the same person???). I'm just saying, at one point, the phrase "Why don't you respect yourself by respecting a felloow fucking woman you stupid bitch FUC K YOU CUNT" is said.

In the comment thread in question, Jane Andress is arguing that because, she says, many immigrants from other cultures will vote against women's interests in the United States, women are under no obligation to go out of their way to support immigration reform. After a mild misunderstanding between the two, the replying troll, Maya Angelou, identifies herself as a "AGAY FUCKING WOMAN" and then pens the expletive-riddled comment quoted above. Jane Andress replies, "I am a lesbian feminist I never attacked you for being gay I am not following your excessive outrage maybe you are replying to the wrong person?" (2013b), a notably mild rejoinder. Having clicked through the link, MyPrettyFloralBonnet (2013) replies to HermioneStranger saying that "individually the first two are annoying, but that exchange between them was GOLD."

But while HermioneStranger and MyPrettyFloralBonnet find Jane Andress amusing, others find her troubling. A few weeks later, zap rowsdower posts a plea for Jezebel to "Please stopppp" (2013) responding to one of Jane Andress' comments (Jane Andress, 2013a). Within the post, she links to a comment on an article about *Game of Thrones* star Maisie Williams, in which Jane Andress wrote that he or she wished Williams would steer clear of the "unadulterated patriarchal filth that is GoT" (Jane Andress, 2013a), and which as of this writing had garnered 141 replies. Unlike the first thread, in which her position on immigration is significantly out of step with the larger Jezebel discussion, a comment thread critiquing a popular television show for its portrayal of women is not intuitively beyond the pale for a feminist blog[21]—Jane Andress even name-drops feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian, who critiques the objectification of

[21] Indeed, in the years since, *Game of Thrones* has come under considerable fire for its portrayal of women.

women in video games.[22] And unlike Maya Angelou[23], Jane Andress maintains her composure throughout, even at one point telling a commenter defending the show, "I do not see it I will respectfully agree to disagree though."

Wherefore, then, troll status? One possibility is that zap rowsdower has looked at Jane Andress' larger comment history, which contains some comments that are, as with the immigration comment, outside the Jezebel norms. Another possibility is that it is the way Jane Andress presents her ideas that makes them trollish. Commenters engage in detailed rhetorical analysis of their trolls, often pointing to language style as evidence that such-and-such a troll could be an old, banned troll going by another name. They also discuss the stylistic factors associated with people they deem trolls: one particular brand, they observe, tends to take a pretentiously intellectual tone and often uses terms like "logic" and "rational" (see Pyrax, 2013, and Penabler, 2013). For commenters accustomed to this level of close reading, mentions of "egregious sexist of the third degree," "flagrant" and "putrid filth," and "a patriarchy members wet dream" apparently raise some flags. Jane Andress' syntax is somewhat odd, recalling HermioneStranger's comment that sometimes she engages with trolls thinking that some of the more unusual elements of their posts may be because English is not their first language. As with the first time Jane Andress was mentioned, one commenter's first reaction is amusement.

> **Tabitha (2013):**[24] Ok, that was kind of hilarious. I think she's a performance. She's like what other sites accuse the Jez commentariat of being: totally humorless, stubborn, man-hating, and seeing sexism everywhere.
>
> > **Zap Rowsdower**: Real or fake, she is the straw man that people accuse Jezebel commenters of being.

[22] As the Sarkeesian-targeted harassment campaign of Gamergate did not occur until 2014, this is not the trolling dog whistle it might appear to contemporary eyes.
[23] The commenter, not the poet.
[24] This comment and those that follow are cited as a thread.

> **RuthSlayderGinsburg**: Is it just me, or are we getting a lot more trolls of this type lately? Can't decide if I like more, or hate more, than our usual Jez trolls.
>
> **Tabitha**: I think at some point in the last few months we've been discovered by the Reddit/MRA/asshole sub-culture forums and probably regularly get linked over there. I bet the Lindy situation about the rape jokes probably had a lot to do with it too[25].
>
> **RuthSlayderGinsburg**: I hate it b/c they always end up with several likes from people who probably just aren't thinking clearly, and I'm like "STOPPIT YOU AREN'T HELPING."

Zap Rowsdower's investment in labeling Jane Andress a troll and convincing people to stop replying to her does not come just from fears that she may be toying with the community. Rather, Zap Rowsdower attributes her objection to the fact that saying things like "you are only defending this putrid filth due to male privilege" (Jane Andress, 2013c) validates many people's negative ideas about Jezebel and its commenters, and that, as RuthSlayderGinsburg points out, by responding to her in such numbers, they are legitimizing her position within the spectrum of accepted Jezebel discourse. Labeling her a troll, then, becomes a form of dissociating Jezebel from an exaggerated representation of feminism that is often used to dismiss it, drawing the boundary to the left as well as to the right.

iii: J'accuse

Although most of the time posts about specific interactions refer to other people as confirmed or suspected trolls, occasionally commenters post about having been called a troll themselves. Often this results in reassurances that the commenter is obviously not a troll, though sometimes fellow Groupthinkers examine the interaction in question, report back, and explain why the person might have interpreted them that way.

[25] In July 2012, then-Jezebel author Lindy West had written an article saying that it was inappropriate for male comedians to make rape jokes. The article drew considerable negative attention from anti-feminists and ignited a years-long harassment campaign that will be addressed further in the next chapter.

In one such post, commenter LittleDanni complained that she had been accused of being a troll, as apparently sometimes happens "when [her] concept of Feminism as a class-based (economic) movement clashes with individuals whose concept of Feminism is based strictly on social/cultural conditions without historical/progressive context" (LittleDanni, 2013). What this means, LittleDanni explains, is that on a post about the Madonna/whore dichotomy, she argued that the conversation would be incomplete without also discussing the male "'provider/brute' dichotomy, which is symbiotic," and she was subsequently accused of being a troll and derailing a conversation about women to talk about men's oppression. LittleDanni objected to this characterization, she said, because "in order to address and combat harmful gender roles we must speak and hold discourse on the subject of both men and women and how they're socialized."

> **LittleDanni**: We need to drop these knee-jerk reactions and stop mistaking disagreement for trolling. It's a fine line, but I can say with utter certainty that I don't come around here to fuck with you all….In closing, you're all great and I wouldn't make this post otherwise. Next time any of us have an knee-jerk reaction I'd just hope that we can ask ourselves if we're actually helping by limiting the discourse, or if we need to take a step back and perhaps reconsider the lines we consider to be uncrossable.

In a space preoccupied with deciding what is and is not a troll, this particular defense of open-mindedness, even from someone who professes to love the community, goes over poorly. Bringing problems facing one group into conversations about problems facing another is generally frowned upon at Jezebel—consider that Dodai Stewart wrote an entire commenting guide to help people not derail conversations about race by saying that they were really sad as a child that there weren't red-haired Barbies—so this is somewhat dicey rhetorical territory. Although there is some validation for LittleDanni's frustration: K2b writes, "I, for one, am sorry if someone is not getting your scenario of the Big Picture" (2013), and someone else suggests that perhaps people assumed LittleDanni was a troll because she did not have an avatar picture up—most of the comments are unified in censuring LittleDanni's actions in the thread.

> **BerkRie (2013a):** Sometimes it's hard to find the line between trolling and disagreeing/offering an alternative viewpoint. I usually try really hard (in my serious posts) to not come off as baiting or condescending, but then I wonder if I've watered down my argument. Perhaps what people objected to was the idea that the reduction of women to stereotypical roles and the reduction of men to stereotypical roles (which obviously happens to both groups) had equal repercussions. As women have demonstrably suffered more from their stereotypes than men have from theirs, I can see how people might reasonably object to the equalization.
>
> **LemonShapedRock (2013):** I missed the earlier thread, but it can definitely be distracting to have someone raise the issue of men's problems in the context of a feminist discussion. And dealing with people who want to take the conversation in this direction is a regular problem. Given that problem, emphasizing "both sides" of an issue could end up sounding like you are denying that women, as a gender, are systematically oppressed to an extent that men are not (even if that is not your intention). I suppose I'm also just not convinced that it is in any sense impossible to discuss something like the Madonna/Whore complex without bringing up a man-analogue. That said, it sounds like you were raising an issue in good faith and I agree that knee-jerk accusations of trolling are often counterproductive.

BerkRie's comment manages to work some coded critique of LittleDanni's self-presentation into what otherwise reads as validation; he or she implicated both LittleDanni's tone and her content in her explanation of how the interaction went wrong. LemonShapedRock also takes LittleDanni to task for not understanding the context in which she was commenting, and therefore how yet another perceived derailing was likely to be received, although she specifically says that this behavior in itself is not worthy of the troll label. Other commenters are harsher, arguing the whole point of spaces like Jezebel is that the whole rest of the internet is devoted to talk about privileged groups (FrogAndToadForever, 2013) and that shoehorning men's problems into a place where they weren't intuitively connected makes it "fair to assume they might have an underlying agenda" (Ruth Slayder Ginsburg, 2013a). Almost all of these comments, despite being critical of LittleDanni's choices, tend to at least verify that her opinions are not trollish in and of themselves. In fact, several of the comments go out of their way to agree that feminism does include and advocate for men. The final comment, from Tristan2Z, sums it up this way:

"Gender roles do hurt men, and that needs to be discussed, but not the way you think, and not every time an adjacent issue is brought up" (2013). Tristan2Z also, however, feels that despite the fact that LittleDanni's "core point is solid," that very reasonableness is what makes the whole interaction "such masterful trolling."

> **Tristan2Z**: Normally I would not say anything but I have to. I've seen some world class trolling on this site but this is some of the best. Wordy, condescending, but always sounding *so reasonable*. No outrageous claims, no overt personal insults, just well phrased lecturing disguised as discussion. It is very.....eye opening.

The position itself may not be ipso facto trollish, Tristan2Z says here, but even this defensive post mounted in Groupthink acts as mere ethos-building. The analysis of tone recalls both discussions of the "logical" and "rational" trolls mentioned earlier in this section and the frustration cited by many commenters at responding to trolls who pretend at first to be "one of us." LittleDanni may explicitly claim to be acting in good faith, Tristan2Z says, but in reality the hook is sharp, baited, and dangling.

Conclusion

Concerns about determining the limits of acceptable dissent had never been part of commenter life before Kinja. While editors had held the power to remove content, commenters could not even delete their own comments, much less someone else's. Now, faced with the ability to curate the comment section on their own, they struggled with the responsibility of identifying what kinds of discourse did not belong on Jezebel. Groupthink discussions allowed these struggles to take place collectively and on the record.

During the first six months of the Groupthink reset, Jezebel commenters had complex and nuanced conversations teasing out the limits of acceptable dissent, searching for the point at

which disagreement crosses a line into disruption. They marked the ways of speaking that help define members of this discourse community and worked together to identify commenters who habitually degraded the quality of discourse.

But the truth is that there is no consensus about what constitutes a troll on Jezebel. In one comment thread, we have SpaceAdmiralPodkayne (2013) writing, "Nah, this isn't a troll, just an asshole. Dismiss and ignore, I say!" and AuroraF (2013) writing, "Being an asshole in order to get a rise out of someone is the definition of trolling, right? That person's totally a troll," one minute apart. Yet, far from mutually exclusive, the fishing framework and the monster framework are both in operation in the same space, sometimes ("pro-life troll (probably a troll-troll)") even sometimes within the same post. To be sure, the monster framework does not mean taking everything anyone says at face value. Rather, this framework acknowledges that even if deception is a part of trolling, disruption is disruption, and certain behaviors are unacceptable regardless of their motivation.

And yet despite its potentially more playful undertones, despite the fact that even within this archive, commenters used the fishing framework when the trolling had less of an emotional effect, the fear of potentially taking the bait has serious consequences for discourse in the Jezebel community. With commenters performing archival research before replying, hesitating before participating, and agonizing in Groupthink about whether a given interaction is trollish, the space that deceptive trolls occupy in Jezebel discourse is actually much larger than they space they occupy on the page; their specter is just as powerful as their presence.

Does it matter, then, whether a given disruptive activity is labeled as trolling or not? On Jezebel, the answer to that question is still under negotiation. Before the dismiss button, without a "dislike" option, calling someone a troll was the only way to silence and invalidate them within

the Jezebel discourse community. Attempting to remove trolls from the discursive equation was important for several reasons. First, it would improve the quality of discussion represented on the site by keeping interactions focused, nuanced, and reasonable. Second, it would improve the experience of community members by stopping them from wasting their time and energy. Finally, as I will discuss in the next chapter, it would also serve as a means of pointing out to the reading audience which opinions were not endorsed by Jezebel commenters at large, thus defending the honor of the community and protecting the record they have put so much effort into shaping.

But with the introduction of the dismiss button, the label of troll no longer had to perform all of those functions. Instead, an undesirable comment could be disappeared altogether, whether because of deliberate provocation or simply because a commenter did not feel it contributed to what they were hoping to get out of their thread. With this added architectural affordance, the correspondence between "disruptor" and "troll" becomes weaker; one might expect to see an increase in the fishing framework as the monster trolls are able to be unceremoniously stomped out. It is a semantic difference, perhaps: whether certain behaviors are given the label of trolling or rejected through other means. But it is also one that allows for a more fine-grained discussion of community values, and potentially for less time spent agonizing over how a given interaction should be handled.

CHAPTER FIVE

Troll Protocols: Tactics and Strategies

> *From the first day the first troll king pooped out his first troll-sac full of butt-eggs (and then told his placenta to eat less/exercise more, fatty), the conventional wisdom has been to ignore them. Ignore them and they'll go away. Stop feeding them and they'll starve. Except...has that worked?*
>
> Lindy West, 2013

They say, "don't feed the trolls," and they've been saying it for a long time. Since the early days of the World Wide Web, "troll" has been used to describe people who come into a community and start trouble for their own amusement (Phillips, 2015). As a means of defense, many communities discourage participants from interacting with users who appear to be deliberately courting controversy—if trolls feed on attention, they can be starved out by lack of sustenance. Dating back to at least 1995 (Wick), the shorthand "don't feed the troll" is intended to stop people from wasting their time and energy and prevent discussion from being derailed.

Susan Herring's work on gender in online spaces has established that disruptive trolling behavior is not only more prevalent but also more damaging in fora for vulnerable groups than elsewhere on the Web (Herring, 1999; Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002). In feminist spaces in particular, she says, trolling poses a severe problem because it exploits a dilemma within feminist discourse: the desire to be inclusive versus the desire to be protective. Is a vulnerable group obligated to put up with people with oppressive ideologies? ask Herring et al.: "When—and where—is it appropriate to draw the line?" (Herring et al., 2002).

Then-Jezebel editor Lindy West frames this tension differently. In a piece titled "Don't Ignore the Trolls; Feed Them Until They Explode," West argued that letting trolls silence women and drive them off of the internet is not a healthy strategy and is in effect simply capitulating to trolls' demands (2013). And yet, she pointed out, engaging with the trolls is also

giving them what they want. “Well, in light of that idiotic Catch 22,” West wrote, “I know what *I'm* going to do. Whatever I fucking feel like doing. I'm sick of being told that I'm navigating my own abuse wrong. I am not interested in being anyone's chew toy—you can chew on me, but I am full of poison.”

Refusing to feed the trolls—ignoring their existence until they lose interest and go away—is ostensibly aimed at reclaiming the space and making it safe and welcoming for women and other marginalized identities. And yet overzealous insistence on freezing out trolls can have the opposite effect, chilling the discourse of the community members along with the trolls and ultimately doing the patriarchy’s work for it. Herring et al. (2002) ask when and where one can draw the line, but from West’s position, it is unclear what that would even look like: ignore someone or tell them off—which draws a line and which doesn’t? Perhaps the question at the center of feminist troll protocols is not when or where, but how.

In this chapter, I look at ways the feminist commenters on Jezebel subvert the to-feed-or-not-to-feed binary when handling trolls in their midst. In April 2013, Jezebel’s commenting architecture underwent drastic changes, simultaneously opening the floodgates to trolls and deferring responsibility for handling them to the commenters. Looking carefully at the discursive patterns around metadiscussion of trolls in Jezebel’s back-channel forum Groupthink, I identify sites of emergent tactical resistance in the commenters’ responses. Drawing on Michel de Certeau’s conception of institutional strategies and subversive tactics, I discuss how Jezebel commenters participate in tactical resistance against both trolls and the strategy of ignoring them, which I characterize as ultimately patriarchal. Jezebel’s prominence as a feminist site and the structure of the new commenting architecture combine to create a hyperawareness of the textual record produced by commenting activity. Looking carefully at the Groupthink community’s

discursive patterns around metadiscussion of trolls, I identify sites of emergent tactical resistance—including an invented technique dubbed "bunny bombing," the short life cycle of which demonstrates why it is vital for tactical approaches to remain contingent and not to calcify into strategy. These tactics, I argue, create moments of agency in an embattled environment.

Strategies, tactics, and trolls

Michel de Certeau's notion of "tactics" offers a useful framework for describing the practices developed by long-time Jezebel commenters. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau unpacks how people work to lead individualized lives in environments largely dictated by institutions. Institutions, he says, operate through strategies—long-term, largely invisible structures governing spaces through calculated rationality (1984). Individuals, on the other hand, operate through tactics, which can be used to resist institutional narratives and agendas. Tactics are contingent and opportunistic—they seize the moment for resistance when it appears. Tactics are "always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing,'" de Certeau writes. "Whatever it wins, it does not keep. […] The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them" (1984). These concepts have come to shape certain conversations about writing, purpose, and power, particularly in the context of work outside of the traditional institutional writing classroom. In *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition*, Paula Mathieu adapts de Certeau's theorizing of strategies and tactics to an institutional setting with which he was probably unfamiliar, reframing strategic, institutional, top-down "service learning" projects as more tactical reciprocal endeavors that reject grand narratives in favor of small, concrete victories (2005). Mathieu's adaptation is careful and convincing, as we see in Anna Plemons' argument that within the carceral environment, too, tactical approaches can help

reject seemingly embedded institutional narratives of redemption and create pockets of agency. Tactics aim low, Plemons says, and they contain their own rewards, not deferred for later but now, in the execution (2014). I take de Certeau as adapted by Mathieu in a somewhat different direction, focusing on writers who comment in an online space that is institutional. Although the stakes of writing in a comment section are exponentially lower than the stakes of writing in a prison, writers in both spaces must claim their own agency in opposition to structures and narratives that would push them in institutionally beneficial directions.

I contend that "don't feed the troll" is an institutional, patriarchal strategy that ignores the online experiences of women and prioritizes the record over embodied selves, an interpretation borne out both by the presence of the dismiss button and by the promotional algorithm that pushes the comments with the most interactions to the top. Following the rules is thus rewarded by a discursive space in which the "bad" comments remain neatly tucked away behind the good or disappear completely; breaking with the intended approach breeds visual chaos. It is crucial to note that two of the most prolific and influential proponents of the dismiss button, Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide and Ubertrout, were later tapped by Jezebel to become staff writers for the main page. That is, promoting the institutional strategy resulted in institutional reward.

And yet to map strategy and tactics so neatly onto ignoring and engaging the trolls would be to greatly oversimplify the landscape. For most commenters, a non-embattled space in which trolls are not present is very desirable, but asking them to forgo tactical responses in favor of institution-sponsored strategies has the potential to deny them agency and invalidate their lived experiences. Conversely, every choice to ignore a troll is not a capitulation to the patriarchy.

> **Jayne Allison (2013):** Normally, I'm a bit of a fighter and I like to push their little buttons until they lose their cool and trollsplode over the internet, but that doesn't really seem to be a good tactic here. I'm not going to make a guy whose name is

> patriarchyforever , look any worse than he already does, but if I lose my cool, then I'm a dick.

Jayne Allison here is not giving in to outside expectations but is instead making a canny decision based on the rhetorical situation—ignoring the troll might not be a way to win, but getting in a public fight with someone so obviously there to pick one is clearly the way to lose. Contingent decisions like this one are a form of tactical resistance even when they have the appearance of bowing to institutional strategy. In the remainder of this chapter, I will use tactics as a means of conceptualizing the small ways in which commenters create agency in the face of oppressive discourses—not that of Jezebel but those of misogyny, toxic masculinity, and other factors leading trolls to seek out women's and feminist spaces for the sake of disrupting them.

Kinja and curating the record

For a full picture of the decisions faced by the commmentariat, it is vital to understand how Kinja's architecture shapes the visual record of discourse. In theory, the tiered gray/black system should allow featured commenters to actively promote worthwhile contributions while keeping unworthy or trollish comments hidden out of sight in the grays. In practice, however, many trolls attract responses from at least one featured commenter and thereby end up being promoted to the black. Hello_America, Out for Blood writes, "When a troll is already in the black I'll feed him. But I'll never be the one to break the seal" (2013b). This restraint is helpful, but it is not enough to prevent a trollish comment from becoming very prominent. Once in the black, comments are subject to Kinja's algorithm for deciding which comment thread receives the top spot immediately below the article, and that algorithm depends heavily on the number of "interactions" a comment—and, crucially, its replies—has received. Suppose that on an article about a female politician a troll posts "go make me a sandwich," and a featured commenter

replies with something crushingly witty. By replying, the featured commenter has made the sandwich comment more visible, and as more people see the zinger, recommend it, and reply to express their admiration, the comment will continue to climb the ranks. If well-intentioned people—like perhaps, Hello_America—are also replying to tell the troll how sexist their comment is (and then other people are replying to admonish them for feeding the troll), "go make me a sandwich" could very well end up as the top comment on the article.

When a troll comment makes it to the top of the comment section, it clutters up the discourse, misrepresents the general discussion, and makes feminists look easy to needle. Thus, even without the dismiss button, the design of the commenting architecture puts commenters in the position of not simply creating the record through their posts but curating it as well. Troll protocols affect both the dynamics of the commenting community and the face that Jezebel (and by extension feminism) presents to the world, and commenters are very attuned to this rhetorical situation. Under these circumstances, refusing to reply to a trollish comment is both strategic and tactical. In the long-term, it may or may not discourage the troll from continuing to post in the space, and it certainly improves the overall quality of discourse. But in the short term, withholding attention at an individual level is also a way of ensuring that a given trolling post does not become the ambassador for the comment section.

Gender and the tactical advantage

Herring et al. (2002) point out that the relative anonymity of online spaces can enable people to open up in ways that could be inappropriate or even dangerous in offline situations. Safe spaces online are therefore of great importance to vulnerable or stigmatized groups, as offline discourse may not even be available to them. West concurs, arguing that advice to ignore the trolls is

highly dependent on male privilege: not only are men unlikely to receive the volume and level of vitriol that women are subject to, but their silence costs them less. Because ignoring trolls is actually playing to their strengths, she writes, decades of continuing to ignore them has only made them stronger—"and if you disagree with that assessment, you're probably not a woman" (2013).

Several interactions between women who advocate for overtly tactical responses and men who disagree highlight just how much the institution supported by the strategy of ignoring trolls is actually the institution of the patriarchy. When male moderator chritter is a nocturnal feminist mancatfish expresses frustration at the "troll fixation" and says he wishes people would use the moderators instead of engaging, Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide, who is usually the dismiss button's biggest advocate, instead breaks down how gender influences this phenomenon. For young women who are encountering these kinds of aggressive behaviors for the first time, she says, it can be hard to know how to respond.

> **Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide (2013b):** Frankly, it can be hard, especially as a young woman, to deal with someone saying awful things that are gross and demeaning and downright fucking scary when you're not doing anything to invite it. You should see the shit I get directed at me when I just post stupid Burt Reynolds jokes in the mainpage. Holy shit. "You're a stupid fucking cunt, I hope you choke on [BAD BAD THINGS] and [WORSE THINGS]." You know how hard it is, as a woman, with all the shit I have been through personally in my life, to see shit like that? On a daily basis? Multiple times a day? It's fucking awful. It really is.
>
> It takes a lot for me to take a deep breath, hit the little X button and go 'lah-dee-dah' back to talking about body wash commercials. And I'm not a 20-year-old who just discovered a forum in a website where that goes on. So, I get that there's some who don't react with perfect mature dignity in those situations. And yeah, they get excited about stuff like bunny bombs and epic takedowns, when maybe they should just walk away, for the better of the community. But I still get *why* they react that way sometimes.

This comment functions on multiple levels. First, as a direct response to chritter, it quietly points to where his male privilege is affecting his perception. With a real and imagined audience of the

kind of young women in question, this comment also uses the record to publicly affirm their experiences while gently pointing them toward a different way. And, crucially, this comment validates a tactical approach: sometimes, it acknowledges, it is okay to take care of your atextual self instead of the record. In his comment, chritter is not simply telling someone not to engage with a troll; he is dismissing the lived experience of young women who are likely experiencing troll interactions very differently than he is.

Part of West's argument against keeping quiet is that doing so disproportionately silences women because women are disproportionately targeted by trolling tactics. "Internet trolling is not random," she writes. "It is a sentient, directed, strong-armed goon of the status quo" (2013). She calls the idea that internet trolling is just a side effect of free speech and open discourse a "*dangerous and patently false myth*" (emphasis in original). Internet trolling does not "just happen"; internet trolling happens to women.

What West describes next is a clear example of tactical resistance: "I feed trolls. Not always, not every troll, but when I feel like it—when I think it will make *me* feel better—I talk back. I talk back because the expectation is that when you tell a woman to shut up, she should shut up. I reject that" (2013). Although institutional strategies—which uphold patriarchal, institutional agendas—advocate for staying silent, she chooses to seize opportunities to push back against both her harassers and the institutions that abet them. Like her fatness, which she has also written about as a site of tactical resistance (2016), West's textual embodiment is going to aggressively represent her autonomy. She refuses to adhere to a model that requires her to censor her experience and keep it from appearing on the page. For women experiencing similar harassment, for her own mental health, for the sake of the trolls themselves and for the sheer pleasure of the thing, she indulges in acts of troll feeding that are their own reward (2013).

Even on Groupthink—even in posts that explicitly reference West's essay—these gendered exhortations to ignore the trolls are present, sometimes unpleasantly so. When Yo, Stapler! (2013) suggests a draconian solution to trolls involving offenders losing their internet and even cell phone access (the point, she says, is to *stop* trolling, not simply mitigate it), chritter once again pushes back, saying that trolling is "the price we pay for anyone being able to speak their mind, even idiots. We don't like the idiots," chritter says, "but we're also not prepared to throw the baby out with the bathwater" (chritter is a nocturnal feminist mancatfish, 2013a).[26] ("This entire argument is one of the craziest fucking things I've ever heard," writes Ubertrout, another prominent male commenter, in a reply directly to chritter, effectively talking about Stapler behind her back right in front of her.) Although she had originally planned to write something about the necessity of ignoring and dismissing trolls, Stapler writes, "one of Lindy's arguments resonated with me: women are always asked to ignore and dismiss and after awhile it forces women out of common spaces because they can't take it. I can't deny that truth." Although Stapler directly cites the essay in which West explains how normalizing trolling harms women, chritter replies by performing exactly the arguments West sets out to eviscerate.

> **chritter:** I disagree. ONLY ignore and dismiss stops the trolls, unsatisfying for the end-user though that may be. [...] [Y]ou can't entirely stop trolling without losing something essential to discourse in the process: freedom to speak. And lots of people have tried, and it's never worked out well. Hate that conundrum if you must, as it's rather disagreeable at times, but there you are
>
> > **Yo, Stapler!** Trolling is not having an unpopular opinion. Trolling is not voting Republican. […] Trolling is when you tell a woman there is a bomb on her front porch. Trolling is when you will literally say anything to make somebody emotionally hurt, when you threaten rape, when you sit there and argue that black people statistically are all stupid, or that women are genetically inferior. […] You are taking what I'm saying and treating it like the apocalypse for speech, like no one will ever say anything again. That's more than a tad ridiculous because it isn't what I suggested at all. But, no, I don't find it ridiculous to take away someone's internet connection for telling someone to go get raped and killed repeatedly.

[26] This comment and those that follow are cited as a thread.

> **chritter:** No, I don't think so. There are already laws against making terroristic threats about bombs on your porch. You can be prosecuted for that, and people are. That to "trolling" is entirely an overstated comparison. You're grasping a bit here, in my opinion. You seem to just want to shut up people you don't agree with via statute or some kind of legal redress.(2013d)

Despite the fact the Stapler has explicitly located her objection to trolling in its threats to women's psychological and physical safety, chritter selects one example of trolling behavior from a long list, "invalidates" it, and then accuses Stapler of "just want[ing] to shut up people [she doesn't] agree with." Chritter is not a troll; he would continue to be an active member of Groupthink until his death in 2017. But in his allegiance to the patriarchal strategy of ignoring the troll, he becomes a part of the system he purports to fight against.

Tactics: Busting the binary

To listen to the Internet, you would think the choices are fairly stark: you either feed the trolls and give them the oppositional discourse they want, or you ignore/delete them and deny them. But as West points out, this is a false binary: allowing the trolls to silence you into "ignoring" them is just another way for them to win. Furthermore, not all responses necessarily feed trolls, nor are all responses directed at the trolls themselves to begin with. A patient, reasonable reply to a troll might be intended to publicly perform the antidote to the "angry feminist" stereotype, or it might be aimed at non-troll people who could benefit from a genuine answer to a disingenuous question. A particularly scathing reply might be intended to score points within the discourse community, or it might simply be to exert some agency at a personal level.

Read carefully, many of the Groupthink discussions of trolling are forms of resistance in themselves. Directed both inwardly toward members of the community and outwardly toward

the occasional trolls that find their way into Groupthink, metadiscourse about trolls is a way of reaffirming shared values and affords opportunities to position the community in relation to those who would disrupt it. In the following section, I look at three metadiscursive tactics that occupy a middle ground between feeding and ignoring the trolls, allowing commenters to react to trolling behaviors without falling into the binary trap that lets the troll win.

Label as performance

For feminists, who suffer from a reputation of being humorless killjoys, the mere act of naming a commenter a troll can itself become a form of tactical intervention. This operates at several levels. First, it may work to discourage other commenters from engaging with the person labelled a troll, protecting the quality of the discourse and of the record and preventing others from unnecessary emotional expenditures. Second, calling out trolling demonstrates that one recognizes it as such--that one has not fallen for it and therefore is not the self-serious and gullible feminist target the troll may have imagined. Given the rhetorical situation in which feminists in general and Jezebel in particular are operating, simply recognizing that they are being baited has the potential to shift the power. Finally, a third function of labeling discourse trolling is to mark it as other. This can be seen most clearly in discourse surrounding several trolls who either are or pose as radical feminists. To some commenters, these trolls are such a parody as to be funny to those who recognize them as being outside of the norms, but other commenters worry about how the comments may be interpreted by readers who are not part of the Jezebel discourse community.

> **HermioneStranger (2013c):** Omg I hate robinjoe so much. She is that special breed of radfem that I think of every time someone tells me that the Republican conception of feminism is a groundless smear tactic with no basis in reality. Like even most radfems give the SCUM Manifesto stuff she's spouting a wide berth.

> **Ivriniel (2013):** Is she a radfem or someone trolling by pretending to to be a radfem? I can't tell.
>
> **HermioneStranger (2013d):** I dunno; if she's a troll, she's a troll who's pretty familiar with radfemology.
>
> **Ubertrout (2013c):** She's every fucking thing Republicans think feminists actually are. GOD I hate her.

This discussion recalls the threads with Jane Andress discussed in the last chapter, in which Tabitha finds it "kind of hilarious" that the troll is "what other sites accuse the Jez commentariat of being: totally humorless, stubborn, man-hating, and seeing sexism everywhere" (2013), and zap rowsdower responds that "Real or fake, she is the straw man that people accuse Jezebel commenters of being" (2013). The concern expressed by both Ubertrout and zap rowsdower is that commenters who appear to hate men and spend their lives looking for sexism under every rock merely fan the anti-feminist flames. If Jane Andress and robinjoe are trolls, perhaps success is not getting other commenters to argue with them but getting them to let their comments stand. By embodying this straw man cliché of the Jezebel commenter, these commenters reinforce that reputation to outsiders. By labeling these commenters as trolls, Jezebel community members are able to gain some rhetorical distance from their radical positions. The act of labelling a troll thus has the ability to intervene on multiple levels at once, sending messages about both the individual and the collective, directed both toward the troll and toward the audience writ large.

I: Laughter as agency

A feminist adage usually attributed to Margaret Atwood[27] holds that men fear that women will laugh at them, while women fear men will kill them. To laugh at (often male-presenting) trolls

[27] This appears to be a paraphrase of an anecdote referred to in Dickson, 1996; the provenance of the anecdote itself is unclear.

without fear of violence is thus a powerful, emasculating move, and it is one that commenters in Groupthink deploy on a regular basis. Because of the unprecedented influx of unfiltered commenters that came with the Kinja transition, many community members were having their first direct encounters with trolls; several community members chose to post in Groupthink as a way of narratively recontextualizing their experiences and providing a record of how unsuccessful their trolls had been. These first-troll posts serve as another tactic for community members to disempower their harassers, leveraging those experiences into community-strengthening exercises that shore up the boundaries between who belong and those who do not. In the absence of any foreseeable way of eliminating trolling altogether, the trolling experience is constructed as a rite of passage of sorts. As part of this process of normalization, the initial story was often followed by other commenters chiming in to offer congratulations or stories of their own.

> **Couchplanted (2013):** I think I got my first troll today, y'all, and I'm all giddy!
> It seems a completely ridiculous thing to get all fangirly over, but I'm one of those people that thinks that nothing I ever write or say is troll-worthy.

The idea of "troll-worthy"-ness illuminates another function of trolling: if feminists receive disproportionate ire from trolls, then to receive ire is to be, in the parlance of the internet, doing it right. By posting about their trolling experiences, commenters call attention to their membership in the group, aligning themselves with ongoing conversations within the community. As one commenter remarks on such a post, "haterz means you made it." Two weeks later, Couchplanted calls commenter Jayne Allison's account of her first troll encounter "the poppin' of the troll cherry." This construction both reinforces trolling as a rite of passage into commenter adulthood and sexualizes the experience in some revealing ways. Prolific commenter doit2julia! commented on Jayne Allison's post:

> **doit2julia! (2013):** Whenever you guys celebrate your first trolls, it makes me feel like a old French whore. I got my cherry popped so long ago & have had so many trolls climb on top of me & do their business in ensuing years, that I couldn't even recall the first if I tried.

Considering that, particularly at Jezebel, trolling manifests as the unwelcome penetration of female space, the sex metaphor is both apt and troubling. Yet it is notable that doit2julia here does not construct trolling as rape but rather as a mildly distasteful, perfunctory transaction in which all of the effort is coming from one party. The rhetorical encounter is eroticized here in a manner that implies consent while also minimizing and emasculating the troll's penetrative act. Her blasé approach trivializes the trolls, undermining their power to control the discourse.

Indeed, trivialization is a tactic adopted by all of the commenters posting about their first times. All such discussions were marked by an arch, mocking tone:

> **Dr Mrs The Monarch (2013):** I know the excitement will wear off, and soon I'll just be another jaded "Oh Those Damned Trolls" person, but for now...Wow. Just let me bask in the glow. A troll noticed me! He found me, and wasted his Very Important Time To Drink Mountain Dew on me! Little old me.
>
> > **Gandalfthegreycommenter (2013):** I.....I'm just so proud for you. *sniff* I want one too! I promise to love it and feed it and walk it every day!
> >
> > **chritter is a nocturnal feminist mancatfish (2013b):** :Awwww, what a cute little under-bridge feller! Congrats to you! :)

By being amused rather than affronted, the commenters flip the script on the troll, trivializing him and removing his disruptive power. In this case, Dr Mrs The Monarch taps into a male nerd stereotype constructing trolls as social misfits with nothing to do but get their jollies online. It is a non-threatening subject position, further underlined by Gandalfthegreycommenter's and chritter's construction of trolls as pet-like creatures. Together these conversations function to position trolls as an inevitable but non-threatening part of online participation. It constructs the

community members in a more powerful position, amused rather than offended and able to talk about the trolls in a space where the trolls cannot talk back.

This humor extends to a whole subset of posts dedicated to mocking unimpressive attempts at trolling. These posts do similar work, positioning the poster as a jaded "old French whore" who not only could not be less bothered by trolling posts but who is actively disappointed when the trolls are not up to snuff. In several posts, trolls are constructed as a source of entertainment, sometimes satisfactory (Penabler, 2013), sometimes un- (Ubertrout, 2013d), a position that implies a profound unbotheredness either way. For example, Ihatepickingnames complains about a recent dcrease in the quality of trolling activity:

> **Ihatepickingnames (2013):** All I want/need is a little something to give me a break, take my mind off things. Generally I can count on the Jezebel trolls to provide the needed laughs. But it's like they're not even trying. I mean, seriously. I feel like I could troll Jezebel better than these guys currently are. What gives? Why have they let me down? I'm not asking for much, just a *little bit* of effort.

There is a playfulness to these posts that constructs agency for the members of the community. These posts model a powerful attitude for the community, providing opportunities for commenters to show themselves collectively unflappable, mocking the disappointing troll in question and sharing their own stories. Trolls troll as a means of performing their judgment, but these expressions of disappointment place the commenters in the position of judging the troll. Such posts declare that it is the commenter, not the troll, who determines the merit of Jezebel discourse.

II: Bunny bombs as neutralizer

For a short period in September 2013, commenters adopted a troll-management tactic dubbed "bunny bombing." Pioneered by Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide, bunny bombing involved

replying to trollish comments with pictures and GIFs of bunnies rather than substantive engagement (Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide, 2013d), using the bunnies as an absurdist response to which there is no rejoinder and retributively wasting the troll's time and attention. In the comments on Burt's original post, her follow up, and a post by IinventedPostIts declaring bunny bombing "the greatest thing [Burt] ever invented" (IinventedPostIts, 2013a), commenters share bunny images, post similar tactics (one mentions dance party GIFs), and collaborate on shared approaches, even discussing which GIF to use in response to which comment in a particular thread. This pooling of tactics continues for a few days and culminates in a post from IinventedPostIts outlining a guide for how to use the technique (2013b):

> 1. NEVER bring a troll out of the grey with a BUNNY BOMB™. They don't deserve our fluffy time.
> 2. BOMB THE TROLL. Hit em hard with bunnies. What could they possibly respond with to all of us? "You are stupid."? "Rabbits make good stew with venison and a sprinkle of lime and garlic."[28] ?
> 3. Carry on other bunny related conversations with your fellow Jezzies IN THE THREAD. We don't just have to respond to him. Our continued discussion of bunnies without him will really up the confusion.
> 4. DISENGAGE THE TOPIC AT HAND. Don't argue with their dumb, hypocritical, bullshit nonsense. That's what the bunnies are for. Let them do the talking and the sniffing, and the hopping, and the fluffing.
> 5. The weirder the better. Just let your bunny freak flag fly.

Properly deployed, bunny bombing provides an opportunity for commenters to give themselves the catharsis of responding to trolls without worrying about feeding or encouraging them. Positioning the commenters as a united front lightheartedly seizing power from usurpers, IinventedPostIts demonstrates the complex negotiation of architecture and the record involved in developing even the simplest of responses to trolls. Despite the excitement for the new technique, there are still strict rules about when to deploy it, and in the comments Burt Reynolds

[28] A reference to a comment made on an earlier bunny bombing thread.

Is My Spirit Guide cautions against overuse: “not every person you disagree with should get the bunny bomb. It should be reserved for rare and special occasions. Otherwise, it loses its meaning. Please!” (Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide, 2013e).

In the last chapter, I discussed how when the word “troll” is applied to too many scenarios, it loses its signifying power altogether. What does it mean, though, for something as inane as replying with pictures of rabbits to “lose its meaning”? What exactly is being signified to begin with? IinventedPostIts begins to answer these questions when she defends bunny bombing to a commenter who snidely objects to the technique as an obscurer of discourse:

> **ivybug! (2013):** Or you know, you could be mature and just walk away and let people who like to read discussion threads read the discussions.
>
> > **IinventedPostIts (2013c):** I really wish people would have restraint with it as well. We are all excited in this moment. And this tactic is not meant for meaningful discussions but more like my original instance when someone asked me "Why I had never thought of using a photo album instead of tattoos to remember my memories" Which isn't even what I said in the first place. Sometimes you gotta fight dumb with bunnies.

Bunny bombing, IinventedPostIts argues, does not obscure discourse because when it is effectively used it means there was no worthwhile discourse there to obscure. That is, it is a technique to be deployed when random assortments of rabbit pictures will contribute just as much to the conversation as the comments to which they are replying. Notably, for Burt and Ubertrout, ivybug!’s rejection of bunny bombing as immature is enough to mark her as outside of the Groupthink discourse community. “This person should GTFO of GT,” Ubertrout writes (2013f), and Burt concurs: “replying to agree with you. For real. WTF” (Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide, 2013f). It is important to note, then, the significance of proper troll talk to community building in the Groupthink space: ivybug! is not labeled a troll, but through her

refusal to play nice in the search for a tactical response, she is marked as an outsider whose values do not align with the community.

As the bunny bombing technique was taken up by more people, as it began to take on structure and become more visible, the trolls adapted. Even within the comments on IinventedPostIts' guide, commenters alerted people that at least one troll had begun responding with pictures of dead and mutilated rabbits:

> **Jorah in a Fedora stars his own comments (2013):**[29] POSTER IS TRYING TO KILL THE BUNNY BOMB WITH DEAD BUNNIES. MORE TROOPS!!
>
> > **IinventedPostIts:** Dismiss and disengage!
> >
> > **PeachywithasideofKeen:** I just got some Playboy bunnies. WRONG. Dismiss!
> >
> > **Burt:** SERIOUSLY, you guisse. That's why you don't over use it, lol. And that's why you don't talk about it. And that's why some people just need to be fucking DISMISSED.

This is an argument for keeping responses to trolls tactical, uncodified, and opportunistic. After all, it was only once commenters adopted the approach en masse that the trolls began responding with dead bunny pictures and scantily clad women. Once trolls have developed a counter-approach, the tactic is no longer useful. Trolls are tactical themselves, making strategy unhelpful—they, too, are operating in adaptable and contingent ways. The process of talking about the tactics, however, has served a purpose beyond the bunny bombing of a few trolls. In addition to creating an in-joke that the Groupthink community would still be talking about a year later (barelylethal: shitass, 2014), it framed interactions with trolls around mischief rather than frustration and gave the community a feeling of collective agency.

[29] This comment and those that follow are cited as a comment thread.

III. Reckoning with the dismiss button

The erasure offered by the dismiss button is a powerful move in a community so invested in the record. A strategic tool, it can function to further Jezebel's interests in maintaining an appealing comment space. But it can also be used tactically by commenters for their own ends.

> **Burt (2013f):** GURL you need to learn to DISMISS! Some of those comments don't belong in a thread about a throwaway/flippant comment. Don't let crazy jerks dictate the tone of your threads. Don't let people derail you like that. There's nothing wrong with taking control of the direction of your comment threads. Period.

For Burt, the dismiss button is not just for trolls. Rather, it serves as a tool for (1) maintaining the clarity of the record ("taking control of the direction of your comment threads") and (2) discouraging trolls from posting in the first place. She maintains that being so quick to dismiss replies that don't impress her has paid off because she no longer receives trolling comments: "It's a message I send that basically says 'Dude, if you want to interact with me, step up your fucking game. Trolls will not comment on a site where no one pays attention to them. If we could all just get through our heads, we'd never have an issue again" (2013c). To Burt, record curation is very important, and she encourages commenters to dismiss not just overtly trollish comments but anything that does not contribute to the discourse they want in their own thread.

Pro-pleasure, pro-dismissal

Ignoring the trolls may be the institutional strategy, but there are tactical elements to it too. Some people, frustrated with people responding to trolls, try to sell the commentariat on the joy that comes with dismissing someone who is angry with you about it.

> **RuthSlayderGinsburg (2013b):** Oh man, I got to dismiss an obnoxious Seatosky post today. It was soooooooo satisfying. People need to learn that the little X in the corner is way more fun than engaging the troll will ever be.
>
> > **Sabelotodo (2013):** I love it. Especially when you dismiss a comment, and then the same troll tries to post again, and click! Dismissed again, sucker! Not getting past THIS wall of fortitude!

> **Ubertrout (2013e):** I got a troll on my Rick Perry article! It was the smarmiest thing I've ever read. It was about four pages long if you look at it in Microsoft Word. The best part was at the end where he made an additional comment about looking forward to sitting back and watching the Jez commenters pile on him. I have never taken so much pure, unadulterated joy from hitting the dismiss button and knowing that no one would EVER read the thing he spent so much time and effort writing. Not ever. GOD that made me happy.

Although the long-term goal of the troll ignoring/dismissing strategy is to eliminate the population of trolls a la Burt Reynolds is My Spirit Guide, these three commenters focus on the pleasure aspect: stoking a troll's impotent rage, they argue, is its own reward. Dismissing a comment is not the same as ignoring it. Using the dismiss button, then, has the potentially to work both tactically and strategically at the same time, curating the record while maintaining individual agency.

Pro-record, anti-dismissal

Although they are in the minority, some people's reasons for wanting to engage with trolls have nothing to do with personal catharsis and everything to do with the record. Because Jezebel is so visible, for some commenters it was a very early experience with feminism, and for these people the quality of the record remains particularly important.

> **Hello America, Out for Blood (2013c):** I also feel that sometimes it is worth responding to a troll, or at least an almost-troll, because the counter-arguments are useful for others to read. I know when I was new to Jezebel a few years ago, I was also pretty new to feminism (I definitely didn't understand it before). It was quite helpful to see the arguments about why telling a woman to smile is harassment and sexist, why you don't touch a black woman's hair, how the patriarchy fails men - and these were often in response to trolls or at least assholes. It's educational, even if the troll him/herself doesn't deserve the education. So keep arguing!!
>
> > **FlossieLou (2013):** I agree. I lurked Jezebel a long time before joining (I was too afraid to comment) and the discussions I saw really helped my understanding of feminist issues. It's like a sociology class sometimes!

> **BerkRie (2013b):** There are a particularly large amount of trolls on that post, it seems to me. Even I couldn't help feeding one or two, in the off chance a third party not-quite-troll might see it.

For these commenters, articulating ideas and arguments, even for concepts that may seem simple, is not a waste of time but a form of education and ambassadorship. It may break with the strategy of not engaging with trolls, but tactically it seizes an opportunity to educate. What is notable about this genre of comment is that for the most part they have nothing to do with getting through to the actual suspected troll (one exception is VioletGatesy, who encourages responding to "ignorant, well intentioned questions like 'why is the word gypsy bad to use?'" because "since so many people are unaware this is even an issue, educating them could produce an ally" [2013]). Rather, they focus on what might be accomplished by making sure the proper responses get on the record for the sake of their imagined audience.

In other cases, the imagined audience is not necessarily an abstraction. While using the dismiss button can clear out problematic content so no one has to look at it, it can also dispose of evidence that a given commenter has been a problem.

> **HermionePond (2013):**[30] I'm always torn about whether I should dismiss. Because it's satisfying to get rid of comments, but part of me wants to leave the comments there as evidence of people's awfulness. (2013a)
>
> > **Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide**: Oh *honey* for GODSSAKES to you really think we actually need MORE fucking evidence of people's awfulness? That's like saying we shouldn't flush the toilet and get rid of our poo because we want everyone in the house to know that when you poo it is stinky and gross. We know. We know. We totally know. (2013a)
> >
> > > **HermionePond:** I should have phrased it better. It's more an individual thing. Like, if [randomusername] normally posts harmless things, but then on one article starts defending racism before going back to being innocuous, part of me wants to leave [randomusername]'s replies up so that in the future, I remember not to interact with him or her. ETA: Part of me wants to leave it there so if [randomusername] ever denies having

[30] This comment and those that follow it are cited as a comment thread.

> defended racism/been a rape apologist/whatever, people can look at his or her comment history, and say "Ha! I found proof to the contrary!" (2013b)
>
> > **Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide:** See that's like an entirely different thing to me. If you think that there's a commenter who in one thread is all YAY FEMINISM and then in the other is like WOMEN NEED TO WORK HARDER TO STOP BEING RAPED dude, by all means, point that shit out. (2013b)

Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide's reaction here is telling. Perhaps Groupthink's strongest advocate for the dismiss button, Burt performs a visceral recoil at the idea that offensive opinions would be left to befoul the record merely because they are offensive—no one needs to see that, she says. HermionePond's clarification, then, though minute, makes a large difference: once the comment is being kept not for its own sake but as part of a larger rhetorical move, to provide evidence not just of "people's" awfulness but the perhaps hypocritical awfulness of a particular commenter, Burt no longer objects. The record does not have to be pristine; it just has to be intentional.

Conclusion

The traditional reason for not engaging with the trolls is that it gives them what they want, and then they come back. Starving the trolls means a better, less antagonistic discursive space that requires less effort to maintain. A second reason for not engaging the trolls is that due to a patriarchal architectural feature, it pushes them to the top and makes them more visible. Commenters are now responsible not just for creating the textual record but for curating it, for deciding what people see on Jezebel, and by extension, for presenting feminism to the Web.

The Kinja architecture means that responding to trolls brings them out of the grays and promotes the thread, obscuring quality discourse, misrepresenting the general discussion, and

presenting feminists as easy marks. But ignoring them lets their bad opinions stay on the record without a rebuttal, and it is important for fledgling feminists to see feminist arguments in action. Dismissing posts means that the trolls do not get their satisfaction, that their posts are not cluttering up the comment section, and that no one else will be tempted to engage with them. But it also creates a false record of responses, with no marker to indicate that anything had ever existed where the comment was deleted. Unlike the deployment of the troll label, the dismiss button does not just invalidate a comment but expunges it from the record altogether. Although all online archives are unreliable and should be assumed to be incomplete, the presence of the dismiss button means that the comment record is now even more unstable and can never be assumed to be anything close to a complete archive of responses.

There are three main considerations in play when commenters are trying to decide how to respond to trolls: the textual record of the community, the atextual experience of being a part of the community, and the atextual experience of being an individual. Commenters balance their textual embodiment—their performed identity as contained in their comment history—with their atextual embodiment: their lived experience, the emotions and material conditions of the person behind the keyboard. Strategic approaches like freezing the trolls out depend to a certain degree on commenters being willing to ignore their atextual lived experiences in favor of creating a particular collective textual body.

West's manifesto, I contend, advocates for a tactical approach to trolls that proceeds from the atextual self but does not remain there. Instead, textual embodiment becomes resistance, marking the record in defiance of strategy. Because "whatever [tactics] wins, it does not keep" (de Certeau, 1984), tactical actions must be their own reward, and the commenters on

Groupthink have become adept at finding these tactical moments in which to push back against both trolls and patriarchal strategies.

A key tension in this process is that between individual and community: while feeding a troll may provide personal satisfaction, it also ostensibly reinforces the troll's commitment to harassing future targets in this space—such is the argument made by Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide in particular. And yet to frame this as a choice between individual and collective interest would be an oversimplification. Such an argument assumes that allowing trollish discourse to continue without response in the hopes that it will eventually stop serves the community better than the shared catharsis of pushback. Certainly the tactical choice to engage is not without consequence for the community, but neither is allowing offensive statements or personal attacks to go unchallenged. Although many commenters still promote the strategy of ignoring trolls, even those community members recognize the sometimes-gendered necessity of occasional resistance. Aggressive "don't feed the troll" policies silence vulnerable community members as effectively as the trolls themselves, and with the transition to the new Kinja system, commenters were given the power to silence but instructed not to use their power to speak.

CONCLUSION

Five hours after I sent my 2010 email to Jessica Coen, she responded. Although she could not respond to every email, she said, she did read them all, and she wanted me to know that I had been heard. She acknowledged the delicacy of the situation and said she did not want to simply write a stopgap post addressing the dustup of the day, and that the issues were important and should be carefully considered to decide the best course of action for all parties. She would try to respond to me again later and was planning to address the site-wide issues on a larger scale soon.

I was delighted; my overthinking had mattered. I was so optimistic about the future of the space I cared about so much that when I came across a particularly bitter and angry thread in Groupthink three days later, I copied and pasted the email, offering it as evidence that the editors did care and that change was in the works. Shortly after, I left to run errands.

When I came back I had been destarred. Not only that, but there was an angry email waiting for me in my inbox: in it, Coen called my attention to the fact that her email message from three days earlier had been marked as off the record and not for publication, and even if that was just signature line boilerplate, I had disrespected the time she'd spent responding to me and was lucky I had not been banned. My then-husband, noticing a change in my demeanor, asked me what was wrong, and as I tried to tell him I burst into tears: I hadn't thought of Groupthink as publication (this was three years before Kinja's content farming), and I was trying to help, and things had seemed to be moving in a promising direction but I accidentally screwed it up and now a person I admired and respected was angry with me.

I was taking this a little too seriously, my then-husband said. It was just the internet, and if I were this emotionally involved, maybe it wasn't healthy for me to be spending so much time

on Jezebel. So now I felt two shames, one from having made a public and irrevocable mistake, and one for caring about it.

There is, of course, no such thing as "just" the internet. If the 2016 election taught us nothing else, it forced us to acknowledge that online activities have material consequences. Furthermore, the emotions and relationships we experience online are real in themselves; the fact that I cried just illustrates how meaningful this community is for its inhabitants. The Jez comment section is collaboratively negotiating what contemporary feminism will look like, live and on the record. For anyone who cares about the evolution of feminism or the workings up online public discourse, it is vital to understand how that process works.

Research Summary

This is a study of Jezebel, and it is not. It is a study of Jezebel in the sense that Jezebel is prominent and controversial site with material effects on contemporary culture whose working should be understood. But it is not a study of Jezebel in the larger sense that it is a study of the evolution of contemporary feminism, of how commenters leverage textuality for feminist advocacy, of the fraught relationship between feminism and capitalism. It undertakes questions of how ideological communities form, and what role site architecture might play. And it seeks to answer a simple question related to all of this: what is a comment section for?

This dissertation examines the structure and uses of Jezebel's comment section in order to trace how contemporary feminists engage with textuality while negotiating the boundaries of their value system. More than just a history of Jezebel, this close study of its contentious feminist performance can help us to better understand community and resistance in online spaces. My research points to the comment section as a rich and complex space for public discourse, one that

is structured but not determined by the architecture that contains it. Below, I identify four conceptual threads running through this dissertation.

Instability of contemporary feminism

The entanglement of feminism and capitalism manifested by Jezebel is hardly unique and places it solidly within the history of women's spaces online. Even so, the way the site treats feminism as a football to be tossed about and then, Charlie Brown-like, yanked away has consequences that extend beyond Jezebel's own reputation. In her 2002 analysis of over 300 women's sites, Lisa Gerrard finds that "[w]hether or not they label themselves feminist, these sites offer images of powerful, competent women—speaking in confident voices and promoting political action, scholarly discourse, vehement challenges to misogyny, and boisterous irreverence" (p. 298). In the case of Jezebel, I contend, this is simply not enough; as per Katelyn Wazny (2010), Jezebel has allowed itself to become a feminist site by reputation, and claiming to be simply a women's site where feminism also happens sidesteps its visible role in the landscape.

In Chapters One and Three, I explore the push-and-pull relationship between the editors and the commenters as they vied for control over what Jezebel's feminism would look like. The editors, although identifying individually as feminists themselves, deliberately avoided applying that label to Jezebel as a site, preferring to consider the site "infused" with feminist principles (Coen, 2013). The trouble with this infusion, however, was that its vagueness allowed commenters to read what they wanted to into the text of Jezebel, seeing, responding to, and policing feminism even while editors claimed it was not there.

In the roundtable on feminism from the special issue of *Computers and Composition* (DeVoss, 2019), a major concern of Angela Haas' was that her students, having not read Audre

Lorde, bell hooks, and Judith Butler, tend toward a narrow conception of feminism. What my research shows is that a space like the comment section has the potential to create opportunities for commenters and readers to be exposed to different kinds of feminism—diluted compared to Lorde, Butler, and hooks, to be sure, but still multivocal. And although the comment section itself can struggle with race, there are feminists of color doing work in that space to help diversify and decolonize perspectives—and, crucially, holding Jezebel accountable when it drops the ball. In the end, contemporary feminism is in a constant state of evolution; no matter Jezebel's pedigree, there was always going to be someone pushing for it to be better. In this sense, the conflict-ridden relationship with the comments was inevitable.

As the comment section became ever more unruly and resistant, editors learned the risks of courting a label without accepting it. When Jezebel shrugged off the expectations commenters placed on it, commenters made sure those expectations became part of the narrative. But this we-never-technically-said-we-were-feminist gaslighting is only possible because of the fluctuating state of feminism. Although commenters pushed to explicitly solidify boundaries, doing so was not as simple as simply correcting the editors; there is no feminist pope to hand down edicts about what "we" believe. This is also a time when, due to the rising prominence of Twitter and Facebook as both platforms for conversation and linksharing methods, definitions of feminism were beginning to evolve. In this environment-in-flux, commenters enacted a textured, multivocal counterweight that simultaneously drew a boundary and gestured toward the discursive space within.

Comment section as performative record

The idea of the comment section as a record to be consciously curated runs beneath the entirety of the dissertation, but it is most prominent in Chapters Three and Five. There, we see that commenters perform for multiple audiences simultaneously. A zinger in reply to a trollish commenter, for instance, may be technically addressed to the troll but crafted for the benefit of other accepted members of the community. Similarly, a careful answer to a disingenuous question might not be intended to change the mind of the original poster but rather to provide information for a future hypothetical naïf. When commenters use the comment section to push back against the editors, they often address the other commenters along with or even instead of the editorial staff. In the opposite of danah boyd and Alice Marwick's (2010) context collapse, such responses engage in what one might even call context expansion.

Another way of looking at this phenomenon is through the lens of what Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss (2009) call *rhetorical velocity*. To compose with an eye toward rhetorical velocity, they write, is to create in anticipation of one's creation being pulled apart, remixed, and circulated in spaces one never would have anticipated. It is a form of rhetorical velocity in which comments are not (usually) redistributed across platforms but within the comment section itself, moved to the top or bottom of the comment section, embedded in cascading threads of replies, emphasized in black or de-emphasized in gray, deleted altogether. With an understanding of many possible iterations of their writing, commenters compose for multiple audiences and circumstances at once.

In their own study of Jezebel, Molly Bandonis and Paul Booth (2017) claim that "by making feminist/women's issues palatable to a wide audience, Jezebel sacrifices a space for radical and counter-hegemonic feminist discourse" (p. 293). I disagree. Although they lightly

take up the comment section, they ultimately dismiss it as a site of discursive power, misunderstanding the "popular discussion" as having been selected by the editors. This is true in the sense that if an editor has chosen to reply to a comment that thread appears first, but it neglects the complexity of the Kinja system as a whole. Ultimately, Bandonis and Booth claim that Kinja does not create space for dissent, which I contend is untrue—there are certainly troubles with Kinja, but this is not one of them. Jezebel itself might water down its content for mass appeal, but the comment section is regularly used for resistant performances.

As commenters collectively shape the record, boosting (or hiding) one another's content, making intertextual references, and self-consciously engaging with their own on-the-record-ness, they embody what Jacqueline Rhodes calls radical feminist textuality. That textuality is leveraged to construct the comment section as an entity with its own values, separated both structurally and ideologically from the main content and embodying alternative performances of feminism.

Role of architecture

As Kaitlin Clinnin and Katie Manthey (2019) remind us, technologies are not neutral. They inherently come from and promote particular perspectives, embodiments, agendas, and values. Thus, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five, we end up with a commenting architecture that awards prominence to the most-responded-to comments while also opening that vulnerable group of commenters to those who are predisposed to harass them. As when Denton stood by while Jezebel editors were forced to interact with rape GIFs, so the Kinja structure continues blindly invoking meritocracy while ignoring that its affordances have different and far more severe consequences for differently embodied people. Karen Hoffman (2015) describes comment

sections as a mirror of society, a characterization that perhaps ignores the role that architecture can play in how meaning gets made. And yet, maybe not: the offline world, too, tends to be structured from a point of view that assumes white, cis, able-bodied male-ness, forcing those who do not fit those guidelines to adapt their behaviors and expectations and leverage bits of agency where they can create it. In this sense, perhaps Kinja is truly a reflection.

Chapters Two through Five take up the question of how the affordances of the commenting architecture structure the discursive possibilities of the comment section in different ways. To a large degree, the kind of discourse that happens in a comment section depends on the architecture. For instance, something as simple as threaded comments can, in making lines of communication more clear, encourage more complex discussion. Chapter Two shows that commenting architecture can be used to create investment and commitment in its users to the point that such messages override the explicit instructions being given by editorial comment guides. That architecture, however, is leveraged not just from the bottom up but from the top down. Although commenters, as in Chapter Three, might appropriate or "hack" commenting affordances for activist purposes, the editors could also avail themselves of those affordances to express their disapproval in granular ways, demoting comments and commenters or erasing them altogether.

Capitalism and Labor

Jezebel was conceived in the bed of capitalism, framed from the moment of its inception not as a journalistic endeavor but as a way to make money from a new demographic. Online advertisers paid based on clicks, incentivizing "humor, provocation, four-letter words and controversy" (Smith, 2017) in ways that were previously unavailable to most female writers. Content-wise,

then, Jezebel had considerable flexibility—but to make it past the profit-driven parent company, its feminism would have to be tacit. Thus, the indeterminacy of Jezebel's feminism began as resistance to the idea that overt feminism would be a profit killer, but over time, this indeterminacy became a source of profit in itself as word of its more controversial posts would spread throughout the feminist blogosphere and beyond.

Capitalism will always structure the relationship between the people who design the commenting space and the people who occupy it. Commenters, though aware of and happy to articulate Jezebel's sacrifice of principles for pageviews, had little agency to stop it—at least not without abandoning the site altogether. As several commenters acknowledge, even going to the comment section to register dissent provides Gawker Media with the pageviews they need; even in striving to make Jezebel better, commenters are complicit in making it worse.

The architecture of commitment in the Gawker Media comments was not constructed on behalf of the commenters but on behalf of training up an unpaid workforce committed to creating value-added content for free. Commenting guidelines can be read as employee training just as easily as statements of community values. And Kinja, pitched as a meritocracy that awarded commenters more agency, was a way to profit even more from the labor of the Gawker Media commenting base (not to mention that Kinja itself was, at the time, being licensed out as a commenting system on other platforms). Even after the Hogan/Thiel debacle had shuttered Gawker Media and split up its assets, Denton stood in the ashes and proclaimed that this outcome simply demonstrated the need for the truth to have money on its side (Cite).

From one perspective, this is oligarchical and crass. From another it simply acknowledges reality. Hulk Hogan, after all, could never have brought down the Gawker Media Empire without having his lawsuit bankrolled by Peter Thiel. And as discussed in Chapter One,

the majority of the well-known feminist websites have struggled to survive and then shuttered one by one. Jezebel, pandering and controversial, still stands.

Implications and interventions

In "How Not to Be a Troll," Kaitlin Clinnen and Katie Manthey (2019) identify the dual learning outcomes of their technofeminist-oriented first year writing course to be:

> 1. to understand that online comment sections are not neutral technological spaces but social spaces that can reify or resist dominant power dynamic and to understand personal identities and privileges within these contexts, and
>
> 2. to develop rhetorical methods of engagement that resist dominant discursive practices in that location (such as trolling) and create alternatives rooted in social justice (rhetorical technofeminism). (p. 38).

Although begun long before the publication of their article, my dissertation shows how the commenters on Jezebel answer this call. Taken together, my findings identify the comment section as a troubled and compromised but ultimately significant space for online public discourse. Comment sections, by their proximity to the main content, become paratexts in a way that Facebook comments or Twitter replies could never be. An article critiquing the New York Times' coverage of trans teens' breast binding practices, for instance, received 60 comments on the Jezebel site; the same article posted to Facebook received 2 comments. A quick perusal of the past week of Jezebel's Twitter presence shows that each article posted receives a scant handful of replies and/or retweets, only rarely breaking into the double digits. Although those spaces can host vibrant discussions, the work of the comment section to shape the material

published by the main site in an attached-but-separate space of its own should not be overlooked. It cannot be recreated in any other format.

Comment sections are a deeply undervalued forum of public writing that intersect with many areas of interest in the field of writing studies, and this dissertation contributes to several such ongoing conversations. Joining the small but growing body of work addressing comments as a primary text, I offer new understandings of how the comment section works as a discursive space. The architectural framework directs our attention to the ways that the spatial dimensions of a comment section shape its affordances for meaning-making. Spaces, like technologies, are not neutral, and technological spaces carry baggage from both. This architectural focus also highlights the ways that comments operate multimodally even when just alphabetic text.

Trolling scholarship in recent years has focused on nuancing our understanding of the trolls themselves (e.g. McCosker, 2014; Phillips, 2015). Feminist scholar Emma Jane (2014), however, has argued that this move to more troll-centered discussion trivializes the experiences of the people that trolling behavior targets. Avoiding the ethical ramifications of online vitriol, Jane writes, "imagines the Internet as a level playing field in which all interlocutors are equal and voluntary participants in all conversations" (p. 528). My research focuses on the ways that community members identify and handle trolls, recentering the discussion not just on the marginalized people affected by trolling behavior but highlighting their ways of claiming agency for themselves.

Feminism and women's spaces have been a focus of the computers and composition field since its inception, and many scholars in the field consider feminism to be "an inherent part" of rhetoric and composition itself (Sano-Franchini, Sackey, & Pigg, 2011). My work here examines how everyday writers use textual and architectural rhetoric to shape ongoing cultural

conversations about what feminism is. As commenters strive to effect new feminist performances, my work can also contribute to our understanding of online advocacy. My research points to ways that the commenting architecture might be radicalized and that the comment section might be able to be a space for resistance.

Directions for future inquiry

This project, like the text of Jezebel itself, constellates elements from multiple disciplines and lines of inquiry. As such, there are many areas for further exploration. Three of the most salient:

1. In recent years, sites like the *Chicago Tribune, The Chronicle of Higher Education,* and NPR have dismantled their comment sections in favor of the interactive spaces provided by social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. What is gained or lost in this transition? How do the conversations in these spaces compare to those in a dedicated comment section in terms of population, complexity, and content? That is, what kinds of discourse may be sustained in the space of the comment section but not on these other platforms?
2. Chapter Five and, to a lesser degree, Chapter Two argue that the commenting architecture on Jezebel in its design serves patriarchal and capitalistic ends. What, then, might a feminist commenting architecture look like? What affordances would it offer, and how might different concerns drive its design?
3. Jezebel's frustrating indeterminacy played a large part in its community's engagements with defining feminism. How do the debates on Jezebel compare to discussion on more explicitly feminist sites? In a related but different direction, how is feminism performed and negotiated in other indeterminately feminist spaces?

When Jezebel was founded in 2007, no one could have anticipated how emerging social media sites like Twitter and Facebook would transform online public discourse, largely moving discussions away from official channels and letting them proliferate on their own. Each new platform inflects and modulates those that came before, strengthening some distinctions while blurring others. Furthermore, advances in hardware and software and their accompanying affordances are likely to dramatically alter communicative possibilities in directions that are impossible for the layperson to anticipate—following the news stories about Russian bots shaping the 2016 election, for instance, I have noticed accusations of being a "bot" popping up alongside accusations of being a "troll" in the comment sections of articles posted on Facebook, realigning fears about the consequences of interaction. The purpose of the comment section continues to be shaped by the development of new technologies, some of which will surely transform the landscape as broadly as social media before them. The move toward apps and mobile screentime, for instance, as well as the increase in non-textual discourse like podcasts and videos point toward new shifts in the kinds of modes and spaces in which public discourse will take place.

With shifts in hardware and practices come shifts in demographics as well. While countries in what global business scholar Bhaskar Chakravorti calls the "Digital South"[31] may currently have less access to the Internet than their northerly counterparts, these nations spend significantly more time on the mobile, device-based internet (Chakravorti 2018). As the Digital North, too, continues embracing the trend toward the mobile internet, there is likely to be more interaction between people, ideas, and practices from the North and South than there has historically been. This will shape not only the spaces in which public discourse occurs but also

[31] The nations that score on the bottom half of Chakravorti's research-based chart distinguishing "digitally advanced" nations from "not-quite-up-there-yet ones"; this largely aligns with the global South.

the kinds of feminisms and patriarchies that manifest there. How historically-racially-troubled Jezebel and its historically-racially-troubled commenters will adapt to a changing landscape that challenges their assumptions remains to be seen.

The years since the time period of this study have, however, seen shifts in Jezebel's composition and coverage. Although there were accusations of racism when Coen was succeeded as editor-in-chief by Emma Carmichael, a white woman in her early twenties, rather than by Dodai Stewart, a woman of color who had been at the site since its first months, the past five years have seen noticeable increase writers of color, including both editors-in-chief who followed Carmichael, and coverage has trended toward the global and political. Indeed, Jezebel ramped up its political coverage in the run-up to the 2016 election and has yet to ramp it down—the daily celebrity gossip news digest "Dirt Bag" now has a political counterpart, "Barf Bag," that supplements the site's political coverage with bullet points of developments that did not receive their own articles. Perhaps most tellingly of all, sometime in spring 2019 the tagline was changed: what was born as "Celebrity, Sex, and Fashion. Without Airbrushing" is now "Gender, Culture, and Politics. With teeth." Feminism, of course, remains unnamed.

It is difficult to say whether this new tagline reflects a stronger commitment to progressive values or merely acknowledges that the bar for entry-level feminism has moved. Back in 2014, critics of the Lena Dunham Vogue picture bounty accused Jezebel of failing to understand that feminism was evolving and that previously groundbreaking ideas—like the fact that magazines digitally alter pictures of women—were now mainstream or even quaint. The past several years have seen a huge mobilization of progressives and women, with increased attention to how Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality impacts feminist practice. Are those "teeth" a vagina-dentata-like feminist subterfuge, or simply the new "without airbrushing," a

fresh rebranding of the same old store and the further co-optation of progressive performances by a (new) profit-driven brand? Either way, the comment section has the potential to continue acting as a radical feminist archive that demands better of the feminism of its host. Whether it continues to do so will remain to be seen.

REFERENCES

3-I. (2013a). re: People on GT Who You Think Are Troll-y, What Do You Do? [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/people-on-gt-who-you-think-are-troll-y-what-do-you-do-737393023

3-I. (2013b). re: People on GT Who You Think Are Troll-y, What Do You Do? [blog comment]. Retrieved May 30, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/people-on-gt-who-you-think-are-troll-y-what-do-you-do-737393023

A Caving Ape. (2010). re: Jealous Bitches Start Face-Clawing Catfight! [blog comment]. Retrieved May 12, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/jealous-bitches-start-face-clawing-catfight-5581603

Abrahams, K. (2014). Why Jezebel Has The Wrong Approach To Feminism, Period. Retrieved April 22, 2019, from Thought Catalog website: https://thoughtcatalog.com/kyria-abrahams/2014/01/why-jezebel-has-the-wrong-approach-to-feminism-period/

Advertise with Ms. (2019). Retrieved June 4, 2019, from Ms. Magazine website: https://msmagazine.com/advertise-with-us/

Agumen. (2010). re: 23-Year-Old Dies While Watching Twilight: Eclipse [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/23-year-old-dies-while-watching-twilight-eclipse-5582215

Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life*. Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press.

ajdfkrgri. (2013). re: It's Not Just Pretty White Girls Who Sext, But You'd Never Guess That From the Media (blog comment). Retrieved May 26, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/458834005

Aldred, J., Astell, A., Behr, R., Cochrane, L., Hind, J., Pickard, A., … Wiseman, E. (2008, March 9). The world's 50 most powerful blogs. *The Observer*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2008/mar/09/blogs

Alexa. (2019). Jezebel Competitive Analysis, Marketing Mix and Traffic - Alexa. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Alexa website: https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/jezebel.com

Alexandra Erin. (2013). re: Stages of Grief: You've Been Dealing With a Disingenuous Jerk [blog comment]. Retrieved May 15, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/stages-of-grief-youve-been-dealing-with-a-disingenuou-1109782242

Apatow, J., L. Dunham, and J. Peretz. (2014). Dead inside [television series episode]. In Apatow, J., L. Dunham, B. E. Kaplan, I. S. Landress, P. Simms, *Girls*. New York, NY: Home Box Office.

AuroraF. (2013). re: Clarify. [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/clarify-510894213

barelylethal: shitass. (2013). re: Stages of Grief: You've Been Dealing With a Disingenuous Jerk [blog comment]. Retrieved May 15, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/stages-of-grief-youve-been-dealing-with-a-disingenuou-1109782242

barelylethal: shitass. (2014, June 24). Can "Boring Bombing" be the new "Bunny Bombing?" Please? Retrieved November 2, 2018, from https://groupthink.kinja.com/can-boring-bombing-be-the-new-bunny-bombing-please-1595457528

batlife. (2013). re: It's Not Just Pretty White Girls Who Sext, But You'd Never Guess That From the Media [blog post]. Retrieved May 15, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/it-s-not-just-pretty-white-girls-who-sext-but-you-d-ne-5991936

Bayareachick. (2014). re: We're Offering $10,000 for Unretouched Images of Lena Dunham in Vogue [blog comment]. Retrieved May 11, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/were-offering-10-000-for-unretouched-images-of-lena-d-1502000514

BBWhatsit. (2013). re: Hardwired to Disappoint? The Crushingly Low Expectations of Men [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/hardwired-to-disappoint-the-crushingly-low-expectation-5990630

Bechmann, A., & Lomborg, S. (2013). Mapping actor roles in social media: Different perspectives on value creation in theories of user participation. *New Media & Society*, *15*(5), 765–781. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812462853

Beck, J. (2019). When the "Jezebel" Comments Section Went on Vacation Together. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from The Atlantic website: https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2019/03/friendship-files-these-women-met-comments-section-website/584917/

Beer, D. (2009). Power through the algorithm? Participatory web cultures and the technological unconscious. *New Media & Society*, *11*(6), 985–1002. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809336551

Bergstrom, K. (2011). "Don't feed the troll": Shutting down debate about community expectations on Reddit.com. *First Monday*, *16*(8). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v16i8.3498

BerkRie. (2013a). re: We Live in a Big World [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/we-live-in-a-big-world-1285556060

BerkRie. (2013b, August 22). re: I WANT TO FEED HIM! [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/i-want-to-feed-him-1184029224

Bishop, J. (2014). Representations of 'trolls' in mass media communication: A review of media-texts and moral panics relating to 'internet trolling.' *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, *10*, 7–24. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJWBC.2014.058384

Bizzell, P. (2000). Feminist methods of research in the history of rhetoric: What difference do they make? *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *30*(4), 5–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/02773940009391186

Blair, K., & Takayoshi, P. (1999). *Feminist cyberscapes: mapping gendered academic spaces*. Stamford, Conn: Ablex.

Bless Us All. (2014). re: We're Offering $10,000 for Unretouched Images of Lena Dunham in Vogue [blog comment]. Retrieved May 16, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/1503023853

bluestocking. (2017). re: What do you think about Jezebel? : AskFeminists [forum comment]. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from https://www.reddit.com/r/AskFeminists/comments/4skx7g/what_do_you_think_about_jezebel/d5a5bt3/

Bond, R. M., Fariss, C. J., Jones, J. J., Kramer, A. D. I., Marlow, C., Settle, J. E., & Fowler, J. H. (2012). A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization. *Nature*, *489*(7415), 295–298. https://doi.org/10.1038/nature11421

bookaholic_au. (2013). re: It's Not Just Pretty White Girls Who Sext, But You'd Never Guess That From the Media [blog comment]. Retrieved May 15, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/it-s-not-just-pretty-white-girls-who-sext-but-you-d-ne-5991936

boyd, danah. (2006). A Blogger's Blog: Exploring the Definition of a Medium. *Reconstruction*, *6*(4). Retrieved from http://reconstruction.eserver.org/064/boyd.shtml

boyd, danah. (2006). Friends, Friendsters, and Top 8: Writing community into being on social network sites. *First Monday*, *11*(12). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v11i12.1418

boyd, d. (2010). Social Network Sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites* (pp. 39–58). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

boyd, danah, & Ellison, N. (2007). Social Network Sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *J. Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*, 210–230. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x

branwenmaeve. (2011a). re: The Popularity And Perfectionism Behind Butt Sex [blog comment]. Retrieved May 24, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/461341676

branwenmaeve. (2011b). re: The Popularity And Perfectionism Behind Butt Sex [blog comment]. Retrieved May 24, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/the-popularity-and-perfectionism-behind-butt-sex-5870164

Brockway, R. (2013). It's Not a Game if You Can't Lose. Retrieved May 30, 2019, from http://www.robertbrockway.net/2013/07/18/its-not-a-game-if-you-cant-lose/

Bromseth, J. C. H. (2006). *Genre trouble and the body that mattered: negotiations of gender, sexuality and identity in a Scandinavian mailing list community for lesbian and bisexual women*. Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim.

Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second life, and beyond: from production to produsage*. New York, N.Y.: Peter Lang.

burnersinparis. (2013). re: Age Is Never Just a Number: How Girls Got Older Men/Younger Women Right [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/age-is-never-just-a-number-how-girls-got-older-men-you-5983775

Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide. (2013a). re: I am so beyond done with concern trolling. [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/i-am-so-beyond-done-with-concern-trolling-509618099

Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide. (2013b). re: I miss troll patrol [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/i-miss-troll-patrol-476433808

Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide. (2013c, July 31). re: C'mon, Trolls. Try Harder! [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/cmon-trolls-try-harder-975261539

Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide. (2013d, August 25). The Bunny Loves You Even If I Don't. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/the-bunny-loves-you-even-if-i-dont-1198485595

Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide. (2013e, September 5). re: A GUIDE TO BRIMSG's BUNNY-BOMBING™ (WITH UPDATE!) [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/a-guide-to-brimsgs-bunny-bombing-1258480920

Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide. (2013f). re: A GUIDE TO BRIMSG's BUNNY-BOMBING™ (WITH UPDATE!) [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/a-guide-to-brimsgs-bunny-bombing-1258480920

Burt Reynolds Is My Spirit Guide. (2013g). re: Why do I comment on the main page? Why? Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/why-do-i-comment-on-the-main-page-why-1454155545

Cai, W., & Clement, S. (2016). Poll: Feminism in the U.S. Retrieved July 2, 2019, from Washington Post website: https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/feminism-project/poll/

Campbell, E. (2017). "Apparently Being a Self-Obsessed C**t Is Now Academically Lauded": Experiencing Twitter Trolling of Autoethnographers. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *18*(3). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-18.3.2819

Captain Awkward, J. (2013). re: Stages of Grief: You've Been Dealing With a Disingenuous Jerk [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/stages-of-grief-youve-been-dealing-with-a-disingenuou-1109782242

Carmody, D. (1990). THE MEDIA BUSINESS; Ms. Magazine Prepares For a Life Without Ads. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/05/business/the-media-business-ms-magazine-prepares-for-a-life-without-ads.html

Carmon, I. (2010a). re: Jealous Bitches Start Face-Clawing Catfight! [blog comment]. Retrieved May 12, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/jealous-bitches-start-face-clawing-catfight-5581603

Carmon, I. (2010b). re: Jealous Bitches Start Face-Clawing Catfight! [blog comment]. Retrieved May 12, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/jealous-bitches-start-face-clawing-catfight-5581603

Carmon, I. (2010). The Daily Show's Woman Problem. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/the-daily-shows-woman-problem-5570545

Chen, G. M. (2013). Don't Call Me That: A Techno-Feminist Critique of the Term Mommy Blogger. *Mass Communication and Society*, *16*(4), 510–532. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2012.737888

CHIEF QUEEF. (2013a). re: Hardwired to Disappoint? The Crushingly Low Expectations of Men [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/hardwired-to-disappoint-the-crushingly-low-expectation-5990630

CHIEF QUEEF. (2013b). re: Hardwired to Disappoint? The Crushingly Low Expectations of Men [blog comment]. Retrieved May 15, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/458887600

chritter is a nocturnal feminist mancatfish. (2013a). re: How To Actually Stop Trolling [blog comment thread]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/how-to-actually-stop-trolling-985656440

chritter is a nocturnal feminist mancatfish. (2013b). re: Guys, look! A troll of my very own! [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/guys-look-a-troll-of-my-own-509008067

chritter is a nocturnal feminist mancatfish. (2013c). re: MILEY CYRUS INTERVIEW IS UP! (blog comment). Retrieved April 13, 2019, from https://groupthink.kinja.com/did-you-turn-off-comments-in-the-original-article-i-wa-1255729650

Clark-Flory, T. (2009). Double X comes out swinging. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Salon website: https://www.salon.com/2009/05/12/xxfactor_2/

Clinnen, K., & Manthey, K. (2019). How Not to be a Troll: Practicing Rhetorical Technofeminism in Online Comments. *Computers and Composition*, *51*, 31–42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2018.11.001

Coen, J. (2010a). Commenting On Jezebel: Rules Of The Road. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/commenting-on-jezebel-rules-of-the-road-5621055

Coen, J. (2010b). Jesse James Is The Most Hated Man In America. Retrieved May 14, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/jesse-james-is-the-most-hated-man-in-america-5497251

Coen, J. (2010c). re: Hit On The President, Get A Hug [blog comment]. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/hit-on-the-president-get-a-hug-5538351

Coen, J. (2010d). re: Jesse James Is The Most Hated Man In America [blog comment]. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/jesse-james-is-the-most-hated-man-in-america-5497251

Coen, J. (2010e). re: Meghan McCain Cried When Dad Picked Palin [blog comment]. Retrieved May 14, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/463968687

Coen, J. (2010f). re: There's No Excuse For Unwanted Back Hair [blog comment]. Retrieved May 14, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/464716741

Coen, J. (2011). re: The Real Reason You Shouldn't Fuck Your Professor [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/the-real-reason-you-shouldnt-fuck-your-professor-5865973

Coen, J. (2012a). My Little Comments: Friendship Is Magic. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/my-little-comments-friendship-is-magic-5921121

Coen, J. (2012b). Welcome to Kinja, Our New Commenting System. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/welcome-to-kinja-our-new-commenting-system-5921598

Coen, J. (2013a). Ladyblog Publisher Wants Ladyblog to Stop Writing About Lady 'Quotas.' Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/ladyblog-publisher-wants-ladyblog-to-stop-writing-about-746993240

Coen, J. (2013b). Stages of Grief: You've Been Dealing With a Disingenuous Jerk. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/stages-of-grief-youve-been-dealing-with-a-disingenuou-1109782242

Coen, J. (2013c). Welcome to the New Jezebel. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/welcome-to-the-new-jezebel-470862928

Coen, J. (2014a). Here Are the Unretouched Images From Lena Dunham's Vogue Shoot. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/here-are-the-unretouched-images-from-lena-dunhams-vogu-1503336657

Coen, J. (2014b). re: We Have a Rape Gif Problem and Gawker Media Won't Do Anything About It [blog comment]. Retrieved May 9, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/we-have-a-rape-gif-problem-and-gawker-media-wont-do-any-1619384265

Coen, J. (2014c). We're Offering $10,000 for Unretouched Images of Lena Dunham in Vogue. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/were-offering-10-000-for-unretouched-images-of-lena-d-1502000514

Collins, P. (1989). The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *14*(4), 745–745. https://doi.org/10.1086/494543

Cote, A. C. (2017). "I Can Defend Myself": Women's Strategies for Coping With Harassment While Gaming Online. *Games and Culture*, *12*(2), 136–155. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015587603

Couchplanted. (2013). Did it happen? They chose me! Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/did-it-happen-they-chose-me-508391819

Dahlberg, L. (2001). The Internet and Democratic Discourse: Exploring The Prospects of Online Deliberative Forums Extending the Public Sphere. *Information, Communication & Society*, *4*(4), 615–633. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180110097030

Dames. (2010). re: 23-Year-Old Dies While Watching Twilight: Eclipse [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/464522156

Damon-Moore, H. & Kaestle, C. F. (1991). Gender, advertising, and mass-circulation magazines. in C.F. Kaestle, H. Damon-Moore, L.C. Stedman, K. Tinsley, W.V. Trollinger (eds.), *Literacy in the United States: Readers and reading since 1880.* New Haven, CT: Yale UP.

Daum, M. (2015). "Jezebel Effect" poisons conversations on gender and sexual violence. Retrieved April 25, 2019, from latimes.com website: https://www.latimes.com/opinion/opinion-la/la-ol-daum-jezebel-effect-feminism-college-assault-20150601-story.html

Davies, M. (2014). re: We Have a Rape Gif Problem and Gawker Media Won't Do Anything About It [blog comment]. Retrieved May 9, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/we-have-a-rape-gif-problem-and-gawker-media-wont-do-any-1619384265

Davis, C. J. (2019). Feminist Rhetorical Practices in Digital Spaces. *Computers and Composition*, *52*, 132–141. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2019.01.004

DBIsABiasedIdiot. (2013). re: Stages of Grief: You've Been Dealing With a Disingenuous Jerk [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/stages-of-grief-youve-been-dealing-with-a-disingenuou-1109782242

de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley : University of California Press.

Delany, S. (1987). The Semiology of Silence. *Science Fiction Studies*, *14*(2). Retrieved from https://www.depauw.edu/sfs/interviews/delany42interview.htm

DeletingYourProfileIsImpossible. (2013). re: Our Favorite #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen Tweets [Updated] [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/our-favorite-solidarityisforwhitewomen-tweets-1125272401

DeVoss, D. (2019). TechnoFeminisms: A Conversation About Pasts, Presents, and Futures. *Computers and Composition*, *51*, 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2018.11.006

dgoat. (2012). re: Your Cleavage Is Guilty of "Biological Sexual Harassment," and Other Dumb Ideas [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/your-cleavage-is-guilty-of-biological-sexual-harassment-5885418

Dibbell, J. (1999). *My tiny life: crime and passion in a virtual world*. London: Fourth Estate.

Dickson, M. (1996). A Woman's Worst Nightmare. Retrieved July 8, 2019, from https://www.pbs.org/kued/nosafeplace/articles/nightmare.html

Dobrow, L. (2008). Let's Hear It for Women Who Suffer No Fools. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from https://adage.com/article/media/hear-women-suffer-fools/125671

dodai. (2007). Appreciations. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/appreciations-325574

doit2julia! (2013). My first real trolling! Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/my-first-real-trolling-510618028

Doll, J. (2013). Remembering the Early Days of Jezebel with Anna Holmes. Retrieved May 31, 2019, from The Hairpin website: https://www.thehairpin.com/2013/11/remembering-the-early-days-of-jezebel-with-anna-holmes/

Donath, J. S. (1999). Identity and deception in the virtual community. In M. A. Smith & P. Kollock (Eds.), *Communities in cyberspace* (pp. 29–59). London: Routledge.

Dong Johnson. (2013). re: It's Not Just Pretty White Girls Who Sext, But You'd Never Guess That From the Media [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/it-s-not-just-pretty-white-girls-who-sext-but-you-d-ne-5991936

Dr Mrs The Monarch. (2013). Guys, look! A troll of my very own! Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/guys-look-a-troll-of-my-own-509008067

Dunham, L. (2014). "@MArlowNYC @emilynussbaum @girlsHBO That is DEFINITELY sarcasm" [Twitter post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/lenadunham/status/423987929371774976.

Eble, M., & Breault, R. (2002). The primetime agora: Knowledge, power, and "mainstream" resource venues for women online. *Computers and Composition*, *19*(3), 315–329. https://doi.org/10.1016/S8755-4615(02)00132-9

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An Overview. *Historical Social Research*, *36*(4), 273–290. https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.36.2011.4.273-290

Elm, M. S., Buchanan, E. A., & Stern, S. R. (2009). Question three: How do various notions of privacy influence decisions in qualitative Internet research? In A. N. Markham (Ed.), *Internet Inquiry: Conversations about Method* (pp. 69–87). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ember, S. (2017). Jezebel, Leading Voice on Feminist Issues, Names New Top Editor - The New York Times. Retrieved November 6, 2018, from New York Times website: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/business/media/jezebel-koa-beck.html

Ess, C. (2014). *Digital media ethics*. Cambridge: Polity.

Everyday Feminism. (2017). We Need Your Support! Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Everyday Feminism website: https://everydayfeminism.com/membership/

Fichman, P., & Sanfilippo, M. R. (2015). The Bad Boys and Girls of Cyberspace: How Gender and Context Impact Perception of and Reaction to Trolling. *Social Science Computer Review*, *33*(2), 163–180. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439314533169

FlossieLou. (2013). re: Confession [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/confession-616193579

FLOWERSSHE1. (2013). re: Age Is Never Just a Number: How Girls Got Older Men/Younger Women Right [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/age-is-never-just-a-number-how-girls-got-older-men-you-5983775

FrogAndToadForever. (2013). re: We Live in a Big World [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/we-live-in-a-big-world-1285556060

Furukawa, T., Matsuo, Y., Ohmukai, I., Uchiyama, K., & Ishizuka, M. (2007). *Social Networks and Reading Behavior in the Blogosphere*. Presented at the International Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, Boulder, CO. Retrieved from http://www.miv.t.u-tokyo.ac.jp/papers/furukawa-ICWSM07.pdf

Gable, M. (2014, March 26). The Hugo Problem Los Angeles Magazine. Retrieved May 24, 2019, from Los Angeles Magazine website: https://www.lamag.com/longform/the-hugo-problem/

Gal, S. (2002). A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, *13*(1), 77–95.

Gallagher, J. R. (2015). Five Strategies Internet Writers Use to "Continue the Conversation." *Written Communication*, *32*(4), 396–425. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088315601006

Gallagher, J. R. (2018). Considering the Comments: Theorizing Online Audiences as Emergent Processes. *Computers and Composition*, *48*, 34–48. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2018.03.002

Gandalf the Grey Commenter. (2013). re: Guys, look! A troll of my very own! [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/guys-look-a-troll-of-my-own-509008067

Garland-Thomson, R. (2005). Feminist Disability Studies: A Review Essay. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30:2.

Geiger, B., & Hauser, M. (2012). Archiving Feminist Grassroots Media. In E. Zobl & R. Drüeke (Eds.), *Feminist Media*. https://doi.org/10.14361/transcript.9783839421574.73

Gerrard, L. (2002). Beyond "scribbling women": Women writing (on) the Web. *Computers and Composition*, *19*(3), 297–314. https://doi.org/10.1016/S8755-4615(02)00131-7

Gershon, I. (2010). *Breakup 2.0: Disconnecting over New Media*. Cornell University Press.

Gevinson, T. (2018, November 30). Rookie » Editor's Letter. Retrieved May 5, 2019, from https://www.rookiemag.com/2018/11/editors-letter-86/

Goodling, L. B. (2015). MOAR Digital Activism, Please. *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, *19*(3). Retrieved from http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/19.3/topoi/goodling/index.html

Gould, E. (2010). How feminist blogs like Jezebel gin up page views. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from Slate Magazine website: https://slate.com/human-interest/2010/07/how-feminist-blogs-like-jezebel-gin-up-page-views.html

Grabill, J. T., & Pigg, S. (2012). Messy Rhetoric: Identity Performance as Rhetorical Agency in Online Public Forums. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *42*(2), 99–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2012.660369

Grenoble, R. (2013). "Porn Professor" Admits He Slept With Students. Retrieved May 24, 2019, from Huffington Post website: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hugo-schwyzer-porn-professor-sex-with-students_n_3890958

Griffith, M., & Papacharissi, Z. (2010). Looking for you: An analysis of video blogs. *First Monday*, *15*(1). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v15i1.2769

Groetzinger, K. (2016). How feminists took on the mainstream media and won. Retrieved May 4, 2019, from Quartz website: https://qz.com/643130/how-grassroots-feminism-is-taking-over-new-media/

Gross, D. (2012). Have online comment sections become "a joke"? Retrieved April 27, 2019, from CNN website: https://www.cnn.com/2012/03/11/tech/web/online-comments-sxsw/index.html

Gustafson, K. E. (2002). Join now, membership is free: Women's web sites and the coding of community. In M. Consalvo & S. Paasonen (Eds.), *Women & everyday uses of the Internet: agency & identity* (pp. 168–188). New York: Peter Lang.

Haas, Angela M. (2009). Wired wombs: A rhetorical analysis of online infertility support communities. In Kristine Blair, Christine Tulley, and Radhika Gajjala (Eds.), *Webbing cyberfeminist practice* (pp. 61–84). Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Haas, A., Tulley, C., & Blair, K. (2002). Mentors versus masters: Women's and girls' narratives of (re)negotiation in web-based writing spaces. *Computers and Composition*, *19*(3), 231–249. https://doi.org/10.1016/S8755-4615(02)00128-7

Haraway, D. (1991). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In Haraway, D. (ed.), *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: the Reinvention of Nature*, London: Free Association Books.

Hardaker, C. (2010). Trolling in asynchronous computer-mediated communication: From user discussions to academic definitions. *Journal of Politeness Research. Language, Behaviour, Culture*, *6*(2). https://doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2010.011

Harris, A. (2012). Online Cultures and Future Girl Citizens. In E. Zobl & R. Drüeke (Eds.), *Feminist Media*. https://doi.org/10.14361/transcript.9783839421574.213

Hartmann, M. (2010). 23-Year-Old Dies While Watching Twilight: Eclipse. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/23-year-old-dies-while-watching-twilight-eclipse-5582215

Hawisher, G. E, & Sullivan, P. A. (1999). Fleeting images: Women visually writing on the Web. In Gail E. Hawisher & Cynthia L. Selfe (Eds.), *Passion, pedagogies, and 21st-century technologies* (pp. 268–291). Logan, UT: Utah State UP.

Hello_America, Out for Blood. (2013a). Eureka! Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/eureka-491271833

Hello_America, Out for Blood. (2013b). re: WHAA? [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/whaa-565227462

Hello_America, Out for Blood. (2013c). re: Confession [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/confession-616193579

Henry, L. (2014). The Jezebelification of Feminism. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from Liz Henry website: https://medium.com/@_lizhenry/the-jezebelification-of-feminism-7edff33d417a

HermionePond. (2013). re: I miss troll patrol [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/i-miss-troll-patrol-476433808

HermioneStranger. (2013a). re: Engaging Entertaining Trolls [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/engaging-entertaining-trolls-512063659

HermioneStranger. (2013b). re: My first real trolling! [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/my-first-real-trolling-510618028

HermioneStranger. (2013c). re: robinjoe is as bad as Seatosky [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/robinjoe-is-as-bad-as-seatosky-498420094

HermioneStranger. (2013d). re: robinjoe is as bad as Seatosky [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/robinjoe-is-as-bad-as-seatosky-498420094

Herring, S. (1999). Interactional coherence in CMC. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *4*(4). (2001-03101-001).

Herring, S., Job-Sluder, K., Scheckler, R., & Barab, S. (2002). Searching for Safety Online: Managing "Trolling" in a Feminist Forum. *Information Society*, *18*(5), 371–384. https://doi.org/10.1080/01972240290108186

Hoby, H. (2014, August 23). Taylor Swift: 'Sexy? Not on my radar''.' *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/aug/23/taylor-swift-shake-it-off

Hoffman, K. S. (2015). Comment Forum Speech as a Mirror of Mainstream Discourse. In V. A. Farrar-Myers & J. S. Vaughn (Eds.), *Controlling the Message: New Media in American Political Campaigns* (pp. 221–244). NYU Press.

Holmes, A. (2007a). Become a Jezebel Commenter. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/become-a-jezebel-commenter-262563

Holmes, A. (2007b). Meet The Editors. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/meet-the-editors-261990

Holmes, A. (2008a). The Girl's Guide To Commenting On Jezebel. Retrieved March 4, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/the-girls-guide-to-commenting-on-jezebel-376527

Holmes, A. (2008b). This Year, Let's Call It Quits On The Nasty Nit-Picking. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/this-year-lets-call-it-quits-on-the-nasty-nit-picking-339424

Holmes, A. (2008c). Thoughts About Thinking & Drinking. Retrieved April 25, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/thoughts-about-thinking-drinking-5022871

Holmes, A. (2008d). Yes, On Our Blog You Will. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/yes-on-our-blog-you-will-386933

Holmes, A. (2009a). Commenters, We Have A Problem. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/commenters-we-have-a-problem-5136160

Holmes, A. (2009b). Commenting (Or Not): The Dawn Of A New Day. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/commenting-or-not-the-dawn-of-a-new-day-5192871

Holmes, A. (2009c). Fasten Your Seatbelts...It's Gonna Be A Bumpy Sight. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/fasten-your-seatbelts-its-gonna-be-a-bumpy-sight-5310875

Holmes, A. (2009d). Have Your Cake & Eat It Too: A Guide To Our Reader Forum, #Groupthink. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/have-your-cake-eat-it-too-a-guide-to-our-reader-foru-5420146

Holmes, A. (2009e). The Craft: Commenting On, Contributing To Jezebel. Retrieved March 4, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/the-craft-commenting-on-contributing-to-jezebel-5420147

Holmes, A. (2010a). By The Numbers: Jezebel's Rise In Charts & Graphs. Retrieved May 18, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/by-the-numbers-jezebels-rise-in-charts-graphs-5543074

Holmes, A. (2010b). Know Comment: Rules For Readers. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/know-comment-rules-for-readers-5519896

Holmes, A. (2010c). Refresher Courses: Rules & Guidelines For Commenting. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/refresher-courses-rules-guidelines-for-commenting-5482118

Hopkinson, C. (2013). Trolling in Online Discussions: From Provocation to Community-building. *Brno Studies in English*, *39*, 5–25. https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2013-1-1

Howard, R. G. (2011). *Digital Jesus: the making of a new Christian fundamentalist community on the Internet*. Retrieved from http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=866106

ihatepickingnames. (2013). Why have the trolls quit trying? Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/why-have-the-trolls-quit-trying-1194246300

IinventedPostIts. (2013a). BRIMSG! Bunny bombing is a very successful tool! Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/brimsg-bunny-bombing-is-a-very-successful-tool-1253211044

IinventedPostIts. (2013b). A GUIDE TO BRIMSG's BUNNY-BOMBING™ (WITH UPDATE!). Retrieved November 2, 2018, from https://groupthink.kinja.com/a-guide-to-brimsgs-bunny-bombing-1258480920

IinventedPostIts. (2013c, September 5). re: A GUIDE TO BRIMSG's BUNNY-BOMBING™ (WITH UPDATE!) [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/a-guide-to-brimsgs-bunny-bombing-1258480920

imaginaryfriend. (2013). Queen of the wild frontier. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/queen-of-the-wild-frontier-627319972

Ivie, D. (n.d.). Kim Kardashian Finally Admits That, Yes, She's Indeed a "Feminist." Retrieved July 2, 2019, from Glamour website: https://www.glamour.com/story/kim-kardashian-west-finally-admits-she-is-a-feminist

Ivriniel. (2013). re: robinjoe is as bad as Seatosky [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from https://groupthink.kinja.com/is-she-a-radfem-or-someone-trolling-by-pretending-to-to-499254041

ivybug! (2013). re: A GUIDE TO BRIMSG's BUNNY-BOMBING™ (WITH UPDATE!). Retrieved November 6, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/a-guide-to-brimsgs-bunny-bombing-1258480920

Jack, J. (2009). Acts of Institution: Embodying Feminist Rhetorical Methodologies in Space and Time. *Rhetoric Review*, *28*(3), 285–303.

Jane Andress. (2013a). re: Arya Stark Scandalized by Sexy Toothbrushes in World's Cutest Vine [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/she-is-just-a-doll-i-wish-she-steered-clear-of-the-una-604334529

Jane Andress. (2013b). re: Slam Poet destroys immigration prejudice with maths and flow. [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from https://groupthink.kinja.com/slam-poet-destroys-immigration-prejudice-with-maths-and-511548321

Jane Andress, L. (2013c). re: Arya Stark Scandalized by Sexy Toothbrushes in World's Cutest Vine [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/arya-stark-scandalized-by-sexy-toothbrushes-in-worlds-603395482

Jane, E. A. (2014). "Your a Ugly, Whorish, Slut." *Feminist Media Studies*, *14*(4), 531–546. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2012.741073

janemarple. (2014). re: We Have a Rape Gif Problem and Gawker Media Won't Do Anything About It [blog comment]. Retrieved May 9, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/we-have-a-rape-gif-problem-and-gawker-media-wont-do-any-1619384265

Jayne Allison. (2013). re: Clarify. [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/clarify-510894213

Jess, Queen of the Raptors. (2013). re: People on GT Who You Think Are Troll-y, What Do You Do? [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/people-on-gt-who-you-think-are-troll-y-what-do-you-do-737393023

Jezebel Staff. (2014). We Have a Rape Gif Problem and Gawker Media Won't Do Anything About It. Retrieved May 9, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/we-have-a-rape-gif-problem-and-gawker-media-wont-do-any-1619384265

Joanbeam. (2013). re: On trolls and lists [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/on-trolls-and-lists-505003613

joanbeam. (2014). re: We're Offering $10,000 for Unretouched Images of Lena Dunham in Vogue [blog comment]. Retrieved May 16, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/id-already-recommended-the-oc-but-am-starring-all-of-yo-1503139409

Johnson, J. (2014). re: We Have a Rape Gif Problem and Gawker Media Won't Do Anything About It [blog comment]. Retrieved May 9, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/we-have-a-rape-gif-problem-and-gawker-media-wont-do-any-1619384265

Jorah in a Fedora stars his own comments. (2013). re: A GUIDE TO BRIMSG's BUNNY-BOMBING™ (WITH UPDATE!) [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from https://groupthink.kinja.com/poster-is-trying-to-kill-the-bunny-bomb-with-dead-bunni-1258572709

Joynt, S. (2017). Bachelor Finale "A Small Victory for Feminism" Says Sharleen Joynt. Retrieved July 2, 2019, from https://www.kiss925.com/2017/03/14/the-bachelor-finale-is-a-small-victory-for-feminism-says-sharleen-joynt/

k2b. (2013). re: We Live in a Big World [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/we-live-in-a-big-world-1285556060

Karahanna, E., Xu, S. X., & Zhang, N. (2015). Psychological Ownership Motivation and Use of Social Media. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *23*(2), 185–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2015.1002336

Keller, E. F. (1995). *Reflections on gender and science*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Keller, J. (2015). Girl power's last chance? Tavi Gevinson, feminism, and popular media culture. *Continuum*, *29*(2), 274–285. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2015.1022947

Kellogg, B. C. (n.d.). Jezebel brings its brand of feminism to the Grove tonight. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from latimes.com website: https://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-jc-jezebel-feminism-grove-20131106-story.html

Kendall, L. (2007). Shout into the wind, and it shouts back: Identity and interactional tensions on LiveJournal. *First Monday*, *12*(9). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v12i9.2004

Kendall, M. (2013). #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen: women of color's issue with digital feminism | Mikki Kendall. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/14/solidarityisforwhitewomen-hashtag-feminism

Kirsch, G. E., & Royster, J. J. (2010). *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: In Search of Excellence*.

Kitchin, H. A. (2002). Tri-council on cyberspace: insights, oversights, and extrapolations. In W. C. Van den Hoonaard (Ed.), *Walking the tightrope: ethical issues for qualitative researchers* (pp. 160–174). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Ko, N. (2013). Anna Holmes: Founder of Jezebel | Harvard Political Review. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from https://harvardpolitics.com/interviews/anna-holmes-founder-jezebel/

Korra. (2013). 101 Level Course: Sexism and Racism Edition. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/101-level-course-sexism-and-racism-edition-1211616323

ladylattemotif. (2012a). re: You Know What's Great About You? You Just Can't Take (or Give) a Compliment [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/you-know-whats-great-about-you-you-just-cant-take-or-5925524

ladylattemotif. (2012b). re: You Know What's Great About You? You Just Can't Take (or Give) a Compliment [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/460194536

Lampe, C., Zube, P., Lee, J., Park, C. H., & Johnston, E. (2014). Crowdsourcing civility: A natural experiment examining the effects of distributed moderation in online forums. *Government Information Quarterly*, *31*(2), 317–326. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2013.11.005

Lane, L. (n.d.). Feminist Rhetoric in the Digital Sphere: Digital Interventions & the Subversion of Gendered Cultural Scripts. *Ada:* 17.

LeCourt, D., & Barnes, L. (1999). Writing multiplicity: Hypertext and feminist textual politics. *Computers and Composition*, *16*(1), 55–71. https://doi.org/10.1016/S8755-4615(99)80005-X

LemonShapedRock. (2013). re: We Live in a Big World [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/we-live-in-a-big-world-1285556060

Lento, T., Welser, H., Gu, L., & Smith, M. (2006). The ties that blog: Examining the relationship between social ties and continued participation in the wallop weblogging system. *3rd Annual Workshop on the Weblogging Ecosystem*, 12.

Ley, B. L. (2007). Vive Les Roses!: The Architecture of Commitment in an Online Pregnancy and Mothering Group. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *12*(4), 1388–1408. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00378.x

Lipton, L. (2008). Not on Our Blog, You Won't. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/04/fashion/04jezebel-1.html

LittleDanni. (2013). We Live in a Big World. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/we-live-in-a-big-world-1285556060

littlefish. (2014). re: We're Offering $10,000 for Unretouched Images of Lena Dunham in Vogue [blog comment]. Retrieved May 11, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/were-offering-10-000-for-unretouched-images-of-lena-d-1502000514

lucystrawberry. (2010). re: There's No Excuse For Unwanted Back Hair [blog comment]. Retrieved May 14, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/464716698

lurkerbynature. (2013). re: People on GT Who You Think Are Troll-y, What Do You Do? [blog comment]. Retrieved May 30, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/people-on-gt-who-you-think-are-troll-y-what-do-you-do-737393023

Martin, C. E. (2011). *"You Are the NOW of Now!" The Future of (Online) Feminism*. Retrieved from https://www.thenation.com/article/you-are-now-now-future-online-feminism/

Martin, D. (2008). Welcome To The New Jezebel! Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/welcome-to-the-new-jezebel-374554

Marwick, A. E., & boyd, danah. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, *13*(1), 114–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313

Massanari, A. L. (2015). *Participatory culture, community, and play: learning from reddit*. New York: Peter Lang.

Mathieu, P. (2005). *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition: Paula Mathieu: 8580000835151: Amazon.com: Books*. Retrieved from https://www.amazon.com/Tactics-Hope-Public-English-Composition/dp/0867095784

Maxine Shaw, Attorney at LOL. (2013). re: Stages of Grief: You've Been Dealing With a Disingenuous Jerk [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/stages-of-grief-youve-been-dealing-with-a-disingenuou-1109782242

McCosker, A. (2014). Trolling as provocation: YouTube's agonistic publics. *Convergence*, *20*(2), 201–217. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856513501413

McKee, H. A., & Porter, J. E. (2009). *The ethics of Internet research: a rhetorical, case based process*. New York, NY; Washington, DC; Baltimore, Md; Bern; Frankfurt, M; Berlin; Brussels; Vienna; Oxford: Lang.

Mcken, J. (2011). Jezebel's ridiculous attack on children's shaving kit. Retrieved May 7, 2019, from Jezebel's ridiculous attack on children's shaving kit | Preliator pro Causa website: http://preliatorcausa.blogspot.com/2011/01/jezebel-s-ridiculous-attack-on.html

Menchen-Trevino, E. (2019). *Blogger Motivations: Power, Pull, and Positive Feedback*.

Meyer, M. D. E. (2007). Women Speak(ing): Forty Years of Feminist Contributions to Rhetoric and an Agenda for Feminist Rhetorical Studies. *Communication Quarterly*, *55*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370600998293

Miller, C. R. & D. Shepherd (2004). Blogging as social action: A genre analysis of the weblog. In Gurak, L. J., S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff & J. Reyman (eds.) *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Mishne, G., & Glance, N. (2006). *Leave a Reply: An Analysis of Weblog Comments*. 8.

MizJenkins. (2011). African-American History X: MizJenkins, Jezebel and the Banning of Black Thought – Persephone Magazine. Retrieved May 27, 2019, from http://persephonemagazine.com/2011/03/how-i-became-a-ladyblogger/

MmeSosostris. (2010a). re: 23-Year-Old Dies While Watching Twilight: Eclipse [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/23-year-old-dies-while-watching-twilight-eclipse-5582215

MmeSosostris, M. (2010b). re: 23-Year-Old Dies While Watching Twilight: Eclipse [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/23-year-old-dies-while-watching-twilight-eclipse-5582215

Moe. (2007a). Jezebel: A Love Letter To The Most Awesome Blog Name In The Universe. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/jezebel-a-love-letter-to-the-most-awesome-blog-name-in-262096

Moe. (2007b). Jezebel Pink Slips: Round One. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/jezebel-pink-slips-round-one-280904

Moe. (2007). The Five Great Lies Of Women's Magazines. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/the-five-great-lies-of-womens-magazines-262130

Moe. (2007c, May 24). Jezebel: A Love Letter To The Most Awesome Blog Name In The Universe [Web archive]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from https://web.archive.org/web/20070524094825/http://jezebel.com/gossip/focus-group/jezebel-a-love-letter-to-the-most-awesome-blog-name-in-the-universe-262096.php

mommy_dearest. (2010). re: Jesse James Is The Most Hated Man In America [blog comment]. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/jesse-james-is-the-most-hated-man-in-america-5497251

montereyo. (2015). re: What do you think of the online magazine Jezebel? : AskWomen [forum comment]. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from https://www.reddit.com/r/AskWomen/comments/2n9ilp/what_do_you_think_of_the_online_magazine_jezebel/cmbmyil/

Moore, T. (2013). Feminism May Be Nearing Her Expiration Date. Retrieved July 8, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/feminism-may-be-nearing-her-expiration-date-5989012

morninggloria. (2010a). re: 23-Year-Old Dies While Watching Twilight: Eclipse [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/23-year-old-dies-while-watching-twilight-eclipse-5582215

morninggloria. (2010b). re: 23-Year-Old Dies While Watching Twilight: Eclipse [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/23-year-old-dies-while-watching-twilight-eclipse-5582215

morninggloria. (2010c). re: 23-Year-Old Dies While Watching Twilight: Eclipse [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/23-year-old-dies-while-watching-twilight-eclipse-5582215

morninggloria. (2010d). re: 23-Year-Old Dies While Watching Twilight: Eclipse [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/23-year-old-dies-while-watching-twilight-eclipse-5582215

Morrissey, T. E. (2009). Toddlers & Tiaras: 9-Year-Old Gets Tattooed & Other WTF Moments. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/toddlers-tiaras-9-year-old-gets-tattooed-other-wtf-5377571

Morrissey, T. E. (2010). re: Desperate Housewife: Diagnosing Teresa Giudice [blog comment]. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/desperate-housewife-diagnosing-teresa-giudice-5558168

Morrissey, T. E. (2014). re: We Have a Rape Gif Problem and Gawker Media Won't Do Anything About It [blog comment]. Retrieved May 9, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/we-have-a-rape-gif-problem-and-gawker-media-wont-do-any-1619384265

moweezy3. (2013). Comment on the Fetus in the Bag story... Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/comment-on-the-fetus-in-the-bag-story-1447749221

Moyers, B. (1990). *Evelyn Fox Keller: The Gendered Language of Science*. Retrieved from https://billmoyers.com/content/evelyn-fox-keller/

MykittenbitmebutIlovehim. (2013). Since when does don't agree equal troll? Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/since-when-does-dont-agree-equal-troll-487441680

MyPrettyFloralBonnet. (2013). re: Engaging Entertaining Trolls [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/engaging-entertaining-trolls-512063659

Nagy, E. (2013). How Jezebel's Anna Holmes Made Feminism Fun Again. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Fast Company website: https://www.fastcompany.com/3020167/how-jezebels-anna-holmes-made-feminism-fun-again

Nardi, B. A., Schiano, D. J., & Gumbrecht, M. (2004). Blogging as social activity, or, would you let 900 million people read your diary? *Proceedings of the 2004 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work - CSCW '04*, 222. https://doi.org/10.1145/1031607.1031643

NinjaCate. (2013). Solidarity is For Miley Cyrus: The Racial Implications of her VMA Performance. Retrieved April 13, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/solidarity-is-for-miley-cyrus-1203666732

North, A. (2012). Did Libyan Video of a Journalist's Rape Get Posted on YouTube? [Warning: Graphic Images]. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/did-libyan-video-of-a-journalists-rape-get-posted-on-yo-5883491

nutbrownrose. (2013). re: People on GT Who You Think Are Troll-y, What Do You Do? [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/people-on-gt-who-you-think-are-troll-y-what-do-you-do-737393023

Oputu, E. (2013). In the land of ladyblogs. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from Columbia Journalism Review website: http://www.cjr.org/minority_reports/in_the_land_of_ladyblogs.php

Pasteck, E. (2013). American Guy In Paris Freed From The Idea Of "Consent." Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/american-guy-in-paris-freed-from-the-idea-of-consent-5691871

Penabler. (2013). Engaging Entertaining Trolls. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from https://groupthink.kinja.com/engaging-entertaining-trolls-512063659

Petre, C. (2015). The Traffic Factories: Metrics at Chartbeat, Gawker Media, and The New York Times. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from Columbia Journalism Review website: https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/the_traffic_factories_metrics_at_chartbeat_gawker_media_and_the_new_york_times.php/

Phillips, W. (2011). LOLing at tragedy: Facebook trolls, memorial pages and resistance to grief online. *First Monday*, *16*(12). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v16i12.3168

Phillips, W. (2015). *This is why we can't have nice things : mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England : The MIT Press.

Pilgrim, D. (2012). The Jezebel Stereotype - Anti-black Imagery. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jim Crow Museum website: https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/jezebel/index.htm

Plemons, A. (2014). *A Lingering Coloniality: Considering the Epistemic and Structural (Im)Possibilities of University-Sponsored Prison Writing Programs [dissertation]*. Retrieved from https://research.libraries.wsu.edu:8443/xmlui/handle/2376/5083

Pollitt, K. (2008). *Ms.understanding*. Retrieved from https://www.thenation.com/article/msunderstanding/

Pope Alexander. (2013). re: Troll PSA. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/troll-psa-dont-engage-theadlerian-619097436

possibility. (2012). re: Why Do Men Love "Barely Legal" Porn? [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/why-do-men-love-barely-legal-porn-5881335

Pyrax. (2013). re: Since when does don't agree equal troll? [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/since-when-does-dont-agree-equal-troll-487441680

Quantcast. (2019). Jezebel.com Audience Insights. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Quantcast website: https://www.quantcast.com/measure/jezebel.com#/trafficCard

Queen, M. (2008). Transnational Feminist Rhetorics in a Digital World. *College English*, *70*(5), 471–489.

Quinn, A. (2013). "Lady Things": The World According To Jezebel. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from NPR.org website: https://www.npr.org/2013/10/22/236380707/lady-things-the-world-according-to-jezebel

Raja, T. (2013). How Jezebel smashes the patriarchy, one click at a time. Retrieved June 1, 2019, from Mother Jones website: https://www.motherjones.com/media/2013/10/anna-holmes-book-jezebel-interview/

Ramos-Chapman, N. (2012). The Fall of Schwyzer: How The Male Feminist Crumbled. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Generation Progress website: https://genprogress.org/the-fall-of-schwyzer-how-the-male-feminist-crumbled/

rawrglicious. (2013). re: I am so beyond done with concern trolling. [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/i-am-so-beyond-done-with-concern-trolling-509618099

Reagle, J. (2014). The obligation to know: From FAQ to Feminism 101. *New Media & Society*, *18*(5), 691–707. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814545840

Reagle, J. M. (2016). *Reading the comments: likers, haters, and manipulators at the bottom of the Web.*

redlightpolitics. (2012). Also, about Jezebel's alibi. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from Red Light Politics website: http://redlightpolitics.info/post/17328394212/also-about-jezebels-alibi

Rheingold, H. (1993). *Virtual reality*. London: Mandarin.

Rhodes, J. (2002). "Substantive and Feminist Girlie Action": Women Online. *College Composition and Communication*, *54*(1), 116. https://doi.org/10.2307/1512105

Richardson, L. (1995). Writing-Stories: Co-authoring "The Sea Monster," a Writing-Story. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *1*(2), 189–203. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049500100203

-ridley-. (2012). re: Your Cleavage Is Guilty of "Biological Sexual Harassment," and Other Dumb Ideas [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/your-cleavage-is-guilty-of-biological-sexual-harassment-5885418

ridley. (2013). re: Stages of Grief: You've Been Dealing With a Disingenuous Jerk [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/stages-of-grief-youve-been-dealing-with-a-disingenuou-1109782242

Ridolfo, J., & DeVoss, D. (2009). Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery [Text]. Retrieved May 30, 2019, from 13.2 website: http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/13.2/topoi/ridolfo_devoss/velocity.html

rokokobang. (2013). re: GAhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! Fucking Kinja! I need help reporting a troll -- STAT [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/gahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh-fucking-kinja-i-need-help-reporting-1445169850

Rosenthal, E. (2013). Hugo Schwyzer Twitter Meltdown (before it gets deleted) | Facebook. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from https://www.facebook.com/notes/emma-rosenthal/hugo-schwyzer-twitter-meltdown-before-it-gets-deleted/10151515917637522/

Rottenberg, C. (2018). *The rise of neoliberal feminism*. New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press.

Ruth Slayder Ginsburg. (2013a). re: We Live in a Big World [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/we-live-in-a-big-world-1285556060

Ruth Slayder Ginsburg. (2013b). re: [untitled] [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/i-would-really-love-a-dumb-jackass-and-or-known-mra-or-489456707

Ryan, E. G. (2013). Our Favorite #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen Tweets [Updated]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/our-favorite-solidarityisforwhitewomen-tweets-1125272401

Sabletodo. (2013). re: [untitled] [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/i-would-really-love-a-dumb-jackass-and-or-known-mra-or-489456707

Salmon, F. (2012). How Gawker wants to monetize comments. Retrieved May 31, 2019, from Reuters Blogs website: http://blogs.reuters.com/felix-salmon/2012/05/22/how-gawker-wants-to-monetize-comments/

Samuel, S. (1997). Inside Ms.: 25 Years of the Magazine and the Feminist Movement. *The Women's Review of Books*, (12), 16.

Sano-Franchini, J., Sackey, D., & Pigg, S. (2011). Methodological Dwellings: A Search for Feminisms in Rhetoric & Composition. *Present Tense Journal*, *1*(2).

ScarletHerring. (2013). re: On trolls and lists [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/on-trolls-and-lists-505003613

Schwartz, M. (2008). Malwebolence: The World of Web Trolling. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/03/magazine/03trolls-t.html

Sea Anenome. (2013). re: People on GT Who You Think Are Troll-y, What Do You Do? [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/people-on-gt-who-you-think-are-troll-y-what-do-you-do-737393023

Sedeke, K., & Arora, P. (2013). Top ranking fashion blogs and their role in the current fashion industry. *First Monday*, *18*(8). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v18i8.4314

Seward, Z. (2009). Got a #tip? Gawker Media opens tag pages to masses, expecting "chaos." Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Nieman Lab website: https://www.niemanlab.org/2009/10/got-a-tip-gawker-media-opens-tag-pages-to-masses-expecting-chaos/

SketchesofWinkle. (2013). re: Hardwired to Disappoint? The Crushingly Low Expectations of Men [blog comment]. Retrieved May 15, 2019, from https://jezebel.com/458886952

Slay Belle. (2013a). On trolls and lists. Retrieved May 30, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/on-trolls-and-lists-505003613

Slay Belle. (2013b). re: The Ethics of Mainpaging [blog comment]. Retrieved May 31, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/the-ethics-of-mainpaging-514053521

Slay Belle. (2014). Just a reminder. Retrieved May 31, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/just-a-reminder-1525309646

Smith, H. (2008). 2008: The Year Of The Commenter. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/2008-the-year-of-the-commenter-5121570

Smith, J. M. (2017, May 20). Ten years of Jezebel: the website that changed women's media forever. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/may/20/jezebel-website-changed-womens-media

Snyder, G. (2009). Gawker Comments Are Made of Stars. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from Gawker website: http://gawker.com/5311027/gawker-comments-are-made-of-stars

Snyder, G. (2010). Gawker Gives Up Pageview Addiction, Quickly Picks Up a Monthly Uniques Habit. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from Gawker website: http://gawker.com/5440807/gawker-gives-up-pageview-addiction-quickly-picks-up-a-monthly-uniques-habit

Sowards, S. K., & Renegar, V. R. (2004). The rhetorical functions of consciousness-raising in third wave feminism. *Communication Studies*, *55*(4), 535–552. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510970409388637

sousaphone. (2013). re: Stages of Grief: You've Been Dealing With a Disingenuous Jerk [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/stages-of-grief-youve-been-dealing-with-a-disingenuou-1109782242

SpaceAdmiralPodkayne. (2013). re: Clarify. [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/clarify-510894213

spursforever1. (2013). re: Age Is Never Just a Number: How Girls Got Older Men/Younger Women Right [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/age-is-never-just-a-number-how-girls-got-older-men-you-5983775

Sterne, P. (2012, July 6). Gawker's new comment system. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Columbia Journalism Review website: https://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/no_comments.php

Stewart, D. (2007). Dear Jezebel Readers: We Love You More Than We Can Say. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/dear-jezebel-readers-we-love-you-more-than-we-can-say-293149

Stewart, D. (2008a). A Message From Hortense, Our Commenter Moderator. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/a-message-from-hortense-our-commenter-moderator-5023980

Stewart, D. (2008b). Commenter Executions: The Guillotine Has Fallen. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/commenter-executions-the-guillotine-has-fallen-365355

Stewart, D. (2009a). April Fools Are Hilarious, Irate & Thought-Provoking. Retrieved June 2, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/april-fools-are-hilarious-irate-thought-provoking-5193996

Stewart, D. (2009b). Commenting About Race Is Complicated. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/commenting-about-race-is-complicated-5419185

Stewart, K. (2011). Atmospheric Attunements. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *29*(3), 445–453. https://doi.org/10.1068/d9109

Tabitha. (2013). re: Please stopppp. [blog comment thread]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/please-stopppp-604865736

Takayoshi, P., Huot, E., & Huot, M. (1999). No boys allowed: The World Wide Web as a clubhouse for girls. *Computers and Composition*, *16*(1), 89–106. https://doi.org/10.1016/S8755-4615(99)80007-3

Tannen, D. (2013). The medium is the metamessage : conversational style in new media interaction. In D. Tannen & A. M. Trester (Eds.), *Discourse 2.0: Language and new media* (pp. 99–117). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Telegraph. (2009, November 12). *Best websites: News and Comment*. Retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/6550724/Best-websites-News-and-Comment.html

therealquash. (2013). re: We Live in a Big World [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/we-live-in-a-big-world-1285556060

Tolentino, J. (2015). No Offense. Retrieved April 25, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/no-offense-1749221642

Toppins. (2013). re: The Repulsive Vanity of the Male Self-Portrait [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/the-repulsive-vanity-of-the-male-self-portrait-30757562

Trapani, G. (2005). Geek to Live: Lifehacker's guide to weblog comments. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Lifehacker website: https://lifehacker.com/geek-to-live-lifehackers-guide-to-weblog-comments-126654

Tristan2Z. (2013). re: We Live in a Big World [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/we-live-in-a-big-world-1285556060

Ubertrout. (2013a). re: Eureka! [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/eureka-491271833

Ubertrout. (2013b). Sometimes Commenters Make Me Want to Punch the Internet. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/sometimes-commenters-make-me-want-to-punch-the-internet-509290178

Ubertrout. (2013). The Ethics of Mainpaging. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/the-ethics-of-mainpaging-514053521

Ubertrout. (2013c). re: robinjoe is as bad as Seatosky [blog comment]. Retrieved November 6, 2018, from https://groupthink.kinja.com/shes-every-fucking-thing-republicans-think-feminists-ac-498528054

Ubertrout. (2013d). The Most Hilarious Half-Assed Troll Ever. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/the-most-hilarious-half-assed-troll-ever-566970835

Ubertrout. (2013e). re: Confession [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/confession-616193579

Ubertrout. (2013f). re: A GUIDE TO BRIMSG's BUNNY-BOMBING™ (WITH UPDATE!) [blog comments]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/a-guide-to-brimsgs-bunny-bombing-1258480920

UN_Women. (2018). "Do you believe that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities? Congratulations! You're a feminist. https://t.co/5wGF3aYj2I" [Twitter

post]. Retrieved July 6, 2019, from Twitter website: https://twitter.com/UN_Women/status/1014548179138772993

Veletsianos, G., Houlden, S., Hodson, J., & Gosse, C. (2018). Women scholars' experiences with online harassment and abuse: Self-protection, resistance, acceptance, and self-blame. *New Media & Society*, *20*(12), 4689–4708. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818781324

Veronica. (2013). Book Review: The Book of Jezebel. Retrieved April 25, 2019, from http://www.vivalafeminista.com/2013/12/book-review-book-of-jezebel.html

Vie, S. (2014). In defense of "slacktivism": The Human Rights Campaign Facebook logo as digital activism. *First Monday*, *19*(4). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v19i4.4961

VioletGatesy. (2013). re: Troll it like you stole it [blog comment]. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/troll-it-like-you-stole-it-1450427621

Walther, J. B. (2002). Research ethics in Internet-enabled research: Human subjects issues and methodological myopia. *Ethics and Information Technology*, *4*(3), 205–216. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021368426115

Wazny, K. M. (2010). Feminist Communities Online: What it means to be a Jezebel. *BSides*, *8*.

Weiss, S. (2016). Former "Bachelorette" Andi Dorfman Has Some Advice For JoJo. Retrieved July 2, 2019, from https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2016/08/118643/andi-dorfman-the-bachelorette-feminist-relationship-advice

West, L. (2013). Don't Ignore the Trolls. Feed Them Until They Explode. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from https://jezebel.com/dont-ignore-the-trolls-feed-them-until-they-explode-977453815

West, L. (2016). *Shrill: notes from a loud woman*. New York: Hachette Books.

Wick, B. M. (1995). re: Freedom of Speech [Usenet post]. Retrieved November 5, 2018, from https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/mn.general/94kg0w-yKhM

Willett, C. (2014). *Interspecies ethics*. New York: Columbia University Press.Yo Stapler! (2013). How To Actually Stop Trolling. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/how-to-actually-stop-trolling-985656440

yvanehtnioj. (2013). re: Stages of Grief: You've Been Dealing With a Disingenuous Jerk [blog comment]. Retrieved May 26, 2019, from Jezebel website: https://jezebel.com/stages-of-grief-youve-been-dealing-with-a-disingenuou-1109782242

zap rowsdower. (2013). I Engaged With A Pro Life Troll - Probably Just A Troll Troll. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/i-engaged-with-a-pro-life-troll-1414400199

zap rowsdower. (2013). Please stopppp. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/please-stopppp-604865736

zap rowsdower. (2013). re: Troll PSA [blog comment]. Retrieved June 3, 2019, from Groupthink website: https://groupthink.kinja.com/troll-psa-dont-engage-theadlerian-619097436

Zerilli, L. M. G. (2005). *Feminism and the abyss of freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

APPENDIX

TIMELINE OF COMMENTING ARCHITECTURE CHANGES

Jezebel Comment Architecture Timeline, 2007–2013		
2007	May 22	• Jezebel launches • Commenters must audition for permission to comment • Comments appear chronologically with "@" symbol marking replies
	November 19	• Commenters may now follow one another by clicking "+" or "–" • Individual comment histories visible • Private messaging added

2008	April 7	• Stars debut
		  o star icon automatically given to commenters with 25 or more followers
		  o can also be awarded by editors for excellent one-time or ongoing contribution

	September 22	• Threaded comments debut
		• New viewing order
		  o Most recent comments remain at top for 15 minutes, then are sorted by popularity (replies)
		  o Can switch between old and new viewing order
		• Number of followers required for star is increased to 40
		• "Hearting" introduced: "+" and "–" symbol for following replaced by hearts—click empty heart to fill it in

	December 19	• Facebook commenting introduced
		  o Comments made through Facebook accounts appear both on Jezebel and in individual's Facebook feed; Facebook name attached
		  o No audition process for Facebook comment, but bans are permanent
		  o (unclear when this was phased out)

2009	July 9	• Tiered commenting debuts o Comments from commenters with stars appear in black; non-starred commenters appear in gray

		○ Individual comments can be promoted from gray to black ○ Starred commenters can now see unapproved, audition posts, which appear in pink ○ Commenters must click button to see all comments on each post; default is starred only ○ Reply threads are collapsed beneath each comment and must be clicked to open • New star rules ○ no longer awarded for followers; appointed by editors only ○ starred commenters are "mini-moderators" who can promote and approve comments • Hearting system removed • Open threads debut to "minimize threadjacking" • Comments can be edited for 15 minutes after posting • Viewing order: return to reverse chronological order
	October 15	• Reply notifications debut to tell commenters when someone has replied to them • Tips submission box added to front page • Open forum Groupthink announced
2010	February 9	• Commenters now have ability to change settings to automatically see all comments and/or expand all reply threads
2011	May 23	• Heart system returns
2012	June 27	• Kinja debuts ○ Star system removed ○ Comment order is based only on number of replies ○ Reply threads are collapsed and must be clicked, each link shows the number of replies it contains ○ Audition system is removed and option for anonymous "burner" accounts is introduced ○ Commenters may dismiss objectionable replies to their own comments; dismissed comments appear by themselves at bottom of comment thread
	August 24	• Reply threads show popular replies before giving option to expand to see the rest

2013		• Individual comments may now be starred; number of stars contributes to popularity measure • Commenters now have individual Kinja blogs that structurally mirror Jezebel; content form these blogs may be promoted to the Jezebel main page • Comments are split into "approved" and "pending"; approved are in black and visible by default, while pending are in gray and require two additional clicks • Added ability to toggle between "recommended" and chronological comment order • Added ability to expand all tiers of replies to a comment instead of opening reply threads individually • Groupthink is reset and posting is restricted to a small handful of longstanding contributors pending several application threads